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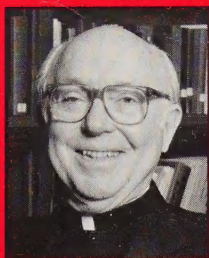
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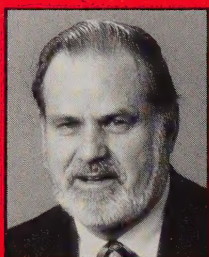




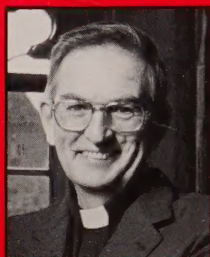
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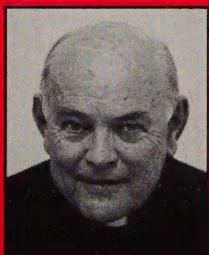
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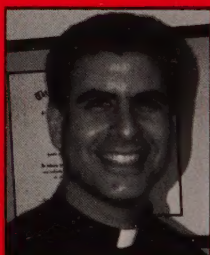
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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## THE LESSON SANTA DOESN'T TEACH

**M**aintaining the spirit of Advent is becoming for many of us an increasingly difficult task year by year. The tranquility of this traditional season for preparing one's soul to celebrate Christmas is gradually becoming more contaminated by our nation's ever-expanding commercialization of the Christ Child's birthday.

The pre-Christmas beauty of homes brightly decorated, streets colorfully lit, and lovely displays in store windows is this year being spoiled more than ever, in my opinion, by the hourly radio broadcasts updating listeners on the number of customers shopping in downtown stores and how many dollars they are handing over at the checkout counters. It isn't easy to see the connection between this grossly material scene and the stable in a small Middle Eastern town where a young, God-chosen girl "gave birth to her first-born son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."

Of course, the living Gift whom God gave to us that glorious night—when angels sang and shepherds were invited to adore—is recalled fittingly in the practice of giving Christmas presents to those we love. Santa Claus, too, as one who delivers yearned-for gifts to children, serves as a stand-in for God, the infinitely kind, generous, lifelong source of uncountable gifts to us all. But it is still hard to understand how the most spiritual Gift ever bestowed on the human race has come to be remembered in such an appallingly materialistic and commercialized way, and why Santa Claus must always take the little ones onto his lap in the context of a crowded department store and never within the parish church's sanctuary.

It is obvious why children are placed on Santa's lap and photographed with him in a place where they are surrounded by toys, games, and other irresistible attractions. Moreover, in such a setting, it is no surprise to overhear the first question that Santa invariably asks each little one: "What do you want Santa to bring you for Christmas?" But what troubles me about the white-whiskered one's usual follow-up question—"And have you been a good little girl (or boy) lately?"—is that it is so totally out of harmony with the true and deepest meaning of Jesus' nativity.

If children are repeatedly, year after year, taught as Santa's Christmas lesson the message that you gain all the good things you want in life by never misbehaving, won't it be natural for them to grow up believing that whenever they don't get from God the favors they desire and pray for, it is a sure sign that God is focusing his attention on their transgressions and, like Santa Claus, putting a hold on his generosity?

What a Santa-focused celebration of Christmas can easily fail to teach is the fact that God's love for children, and for all of us, is *unconditional*. The Gift "wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" whom God gave us that first Christmas night was not evidence that God wanted to reward us for being so good in our behavior. The Savior, who would later lay down his life to open Heaven's door for us, was given to us because God loves us as his children who are good but who still commit sins and need God's forgiveness. That everlasting love and willingness to forgive were made unmistakably clear at Bethlehem. This is what God is inviting us to recall and rejoice over during this and every Christmas season of our lives.

When children grow out of their belief in Santa Claus and are ready to be taught what Christmas is truly all about, they will need us adults to instruct

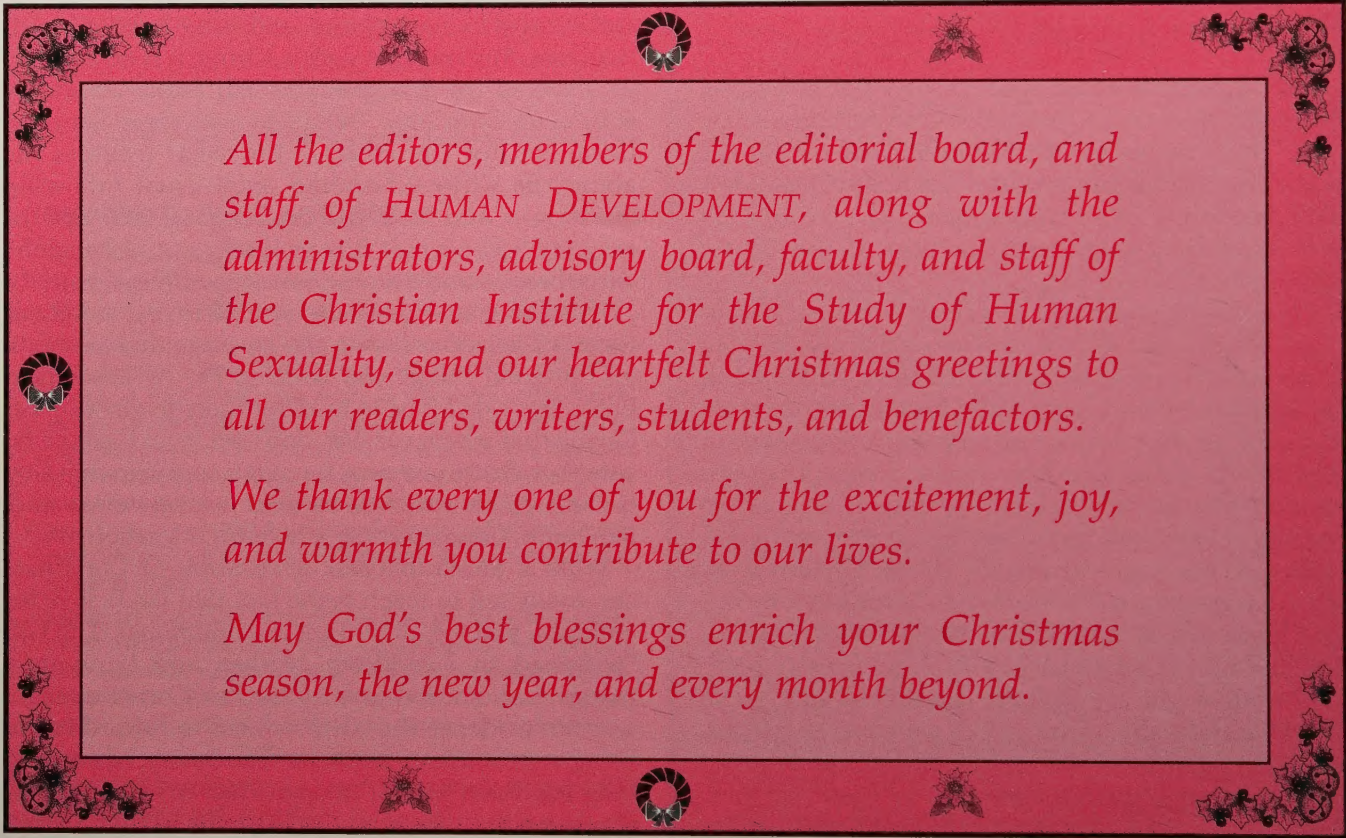


them. We are right now in the midst of the season that gives us a priceless opportunity to contemplate and appreciate with grateful hearts what it means that "a Savior is given to us," as God revealed to those most fortunate shepherds on that silent and holy night. My prayer is that we will all become the kind of people who can assist God to gradually lift the hearts of our little ones from their excitement over the nighttime arrival of Santa to a profound and con-

tinuous gratitude and joy over the coming of their and our Savior.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief



*All the editors, members of the editorial board, and staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with the administrators, advisory board, faculty, and staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, send our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our readers, writers, students, and benefactors.*

*We thank every one of you for the excitement, joy, and warmth you contribute to our lives.*

*May God's best blessings enrich your Christmas season, the new year, and every month beyond.*



# The Helping Relationships

*Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.*

**T**hink about what happens when listening to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." With the ebb and flow of summer, winter, autumn, and spring, we can draw out the distinctions in each seasonal variation, yet at the same time, we can feel the constant essence of the theme. So too, in teasing out the nuances that differentiate specific aspects of therapy/counseling, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction, we find that the theme of the helping relationship is the same, despite the variations.

In our own personal lives, although we are a gestalt of body, mind, and spirit, there are occasions when we focus on variations of the theme of who we are as persons. At times the focus is on the physical; at other times, the psychological; at other times, the spiritual. One might also add that at yet other times, it may be any combination of these. Another way of saying this is that the person may be seen as having primarily three dimensions: the vital (physical and emotional), the functional (intellectual, interpersonal, and managerial), and the spiritual (something more than what meets the eye). In a 1984 *Review for Religious* article titled "Conversion, Pastoral Counseling, and Spiritual Direction," Robert Struminski writes that "to work toward wholeness and integration means to ignore none of these dimensions and

instead to know them and become familiar and friendly with them."

James Ashbrook, author of *Minding the Soul: Pastoral Counseling as Remembering*, notes that "metaphor allows abstraction, linking one area of life with another." This article focuses on the theme of a person's journey into wholeness and integration through the variations of some helping relationships, including therapy/counseling, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction. The goal is to help clarify, in broad strokes, some of the nuances among these helping professions and ministries, particularly given the number of people who are offering these services and, "inevitably," as Michael Jacobs writes in *Still Small Voice*, "more opportunities for exploitation and abuse of the public."

A brief overview of each of these helps is given within the context of any discussion of the pertinent similarities and differences among them. In using the lens of primary focus of attention for each of these helping relationships, this article strives to aid anyone involved in one or a combination of these journeys to selfhood with another person to be more deliberate and balanced in his or her approach. In *Guidelines for Spiritual Direction*, Carolyn Gratten writes that the helper, from deep within, needs "to be



as clear as possible about what can or cannot happen in this particular situation." Such clarity and centeredness from deep within can only enhance all such relationships.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Today, there appears to be a proliferation of people "hanging out their shingles" as counselors, directors, mentors, spiritual *ammās* or *abbās*, soul friends (*anamcharas*), companions, pastoral counselors, and clinical theologians, to name just a few. It would seem too, that most people who go to these "gurus" are looking for some kind of wholeness and healing, whether they name it this way or not.

So what's in a name? The Greek etymological root of therapy—*therapeuein*—means "healing." Salvation—in Greek, *soteria*, in Latin, *salus*—also means healing holiness and health. These roots reveal definite interconnections among the helping professions and ministries. As each evolved with its primary focus of attention, so did its appellation.

Without belaboring the point of connections and variations on a theme, when we look at the roots of present-day words that connote healing and wholeness, we see some interesting similarities. In the Old Testament, two words are used for breath: *ruach* and *nephesh*. The Greek language began to use *ruach* to mean "spirit" or "word" and *nephesh* to mean "soul" or "psyche." In the New Testament, *pneuma*, as "spirit," corresponded with *ruach*. As Ashbrook notes, "They both characterized breath as the unity of spirit and mind. Spirit was distinguished from soul but not regarded as separate from it. Spirit was taken as the principle of the soul. Psyche or soul . . . corresponded to *nephesh* . . . primarily the Old Testament usage of vitality or life itself.

In focusing on the sense of breath, vitality, wholeness, and holiness in both the Old and New Testaments, the interconnectedness and interdependence of who we are and who we are becoming seem evident. Let's look more specifically at the broad parameters of the following helps for wholeness—for the integration of who we are as a gestalt of body, mind, and spirit.

## WHOLENESS/INTEGRATION CONTINUUM

Wholeness and integration, as an ongoing journey, can be seen on a continuum, using the constructs of "abnormal" to "normal/developing" to "mature." Obviously, there is some fluidity among these three areas of the growth continuum. In a 1978 *Review for Religious* article, Robert Rossi suggests that psychotherapy is for the abnormal, counseling for the

normal/developing, and crisis counseling for the mature who need some short-term guidance. It is important not to reify such constructs of normalcy; as Kenneth Leech observes in his book *Soul Friend: The Practice of Spirituality*, "the strong emphasis on sickness, disease and therapy within the counseling movement testifies to its Freudian clinical origin." With this caveat, we next explore the ebb and flow of normal/developing, abnormal, and mature.

When a person can reasonably and adequately cope with life as it unfolds, we say there is a degree of normalcy and, over time with this pattern, some degree of maturity. When we speak of the abnormal, it "is characterized by a notable discrepancy between our thoughts, feelings and actions and the requirements of external reality," to quote Leech. A person who seeks therapy is looking for some relief, some healing of the negative experiences related to his or her inner turmoil and crisis. The primary focus of any form of therapy, then, is health and healing.

**Therapy/Psychotherapy.** Psychotherapy, a form of therapy treatment for personality problems and maladjustments, can usually be traced to unconscious conflicts and/or specific traumatic events in a person's life. Gratton writes that "psychotherapy addresses itself to the inner difficulties that interfere with an individual's ability to cope with the tasks and stresses inherent in human life." Because of the etiology of the client's problems, the primary focus is a type of reconstructive therapy through a relationship (extended or brief) with a professionally trained psychiatrist (M.D.), psychoanalyst, clinical psychologist, psychiatric social worker or nurse clinical specialist in psychiatry.

The goal of psychotherapy is to rebuild and strengthen a person's basic personality, as well as his or her relationships with others and the world. Because of the nature of the therapy, the accomplishment of this goal depends largely on the relationship between the therapist and the client. Both long-term and short-term therapy can be effective if the therapist-client relationship works.

**Counseling.** Counseling focuses on the normal/developing range of psychic health. A client who is distressed in some way is looking for help in dealing with blocks that may impede growth. Counseling traces its origins to the Judeo-Christian tradition. As Leech points out, the word *counseling* is "derived from the same source as *consul*, *conciliate*, *consult*, and suggests an interchange, a two-way process."

The primary focus of attention in counseling is deeper personal integration through consciously learning more constructive ways of problem solving



and dealing with conflicts, as well as developing skills for healthier intra- and interpersonal relationships. Counseling operates more on a conscious level (although hypnotherapy focuses on the subconscious) because its focus is dealing with problems of the here and now, with therapist and client exploring together ways to greater health. "Counseling then," Rossi writes, "is 'supportive' and 're-educative' for individuals in the normal/developing range of psychic health." Gratton defines it as "a contractual coming together of persons for a certain duration in a shared space (commonly, an office) and time (usually, hour-long sessions) during which one . . . uses skills at his or her command for the psychological growth and betterment of the other, ranging from understanding, analysis, advice giving, and behavior change with regard to clients in the 'normal' psychic range."

**Crisis Counseling.** A third type of therapy—or perhaps, more specifically, a particular type of counseling—is crisis counseling, which provides the client with help for an immediate situation or need. This type of counseling, which is of short duration, is for persons in the normal range of psychic health who are experiencing some type of personal, family, work, or relationship crisis. The client is helped to determine what coping skills and resources are available, whether the crisis be abuse, alcoholism, job loss, or grieving. The primary focus of attention is ensuring that the client learns how to deal more effectively with the crisis.

**Pastoral Counseling.** If counseling is a helping process in which the person learns skills and utilizes new resources for coping with life, then pastoral counseling "not only attempts to help persons to help themselves through a growing understanding of their inner conflicts but does so with an openness to the role God plays within their life," to quote Richard Parsons, coeditor of the *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*.

With its focus on the therapeutic clinical/medical model, the goal of pastoral counseling is helping troubled people. "In fact, one of the major concepts of the movements, the 'cure of souls' . . . combines psychotherapeutic theory with pastoral practice," Gratton writes. The techniques used with clients facing such problems as alcoholism, marital problems, suicide, and delinquency are those used in psychological counseling, but with one difference. As Michael Cavanagh notes in his article "Cautions in Pastoral Counseling" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1984), pastoral counselors have training "in helping people with concerns or problems that have both psychosocial and moral-religious (spiritual) implications."

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## Pastoral counseling focuses on integration of the client's faith life with his or her life experiences for healing and reconciliation

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Pastoral counseling focuses on integration of the client's faith life with his or her life experiences for healing and reconciliation. Yet it differs from pastoral psychotherapy, which is more specialized, as is psychotherapy from the humanistic, behavioral, cognitive, and transactional types of therapies.

The Association of Pastoral Counselors defines pastoral counseling as "a process in which a pastoral counselor utilizes insights and principles derived from the disciplines of theology and the behavioral sciences in working with individuals, couples, families, and social systems toward the achievement of wholeness and health" (quoted by Orlo Strunk, Jr., author of "A Prolegomenon to a History of Pastoral Counseling," in the *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*).

### PASTORAL CARE UMBRELLA

Pastoral counseling comes under the umbrella of pastoral care, which is seen as the most inclusive form of pastoral ministry. "Pastoral care is sometimes distinguished from that of counseling by the fact that it involves drawing more on one's spiritual resources," Leech observes.

Because as humans, we are body, mind, and spirit, and because psychological counseling focuses, in its strictest sense, on psychic health, the spiritual or faith dimension of wholeness can be missing. Pastoral counseling is a mix of the social sciences and theology, wholeness and holiness. Donald Browning, coeditor of the *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*, contends that "the major new develop-



ment that has motivated the founding of the pastoral counseling movement has been the insight that most human problems are various mixtures of both conflicted human freedom and moral and religious discernment."

Pastoral counseling is a ministering to a normal person who has particular emotional problems in the here and now. It is usually short-term, with the goal of managing situational crises that interfere with the client's use of normally available inner resources in human and spiritual functioning.

**When Pastoral Counseling Is Counseling.** Pastoral counseling is like psychological counseling in that it focuses on solving problems and on effecting psychic wholeness and integration. It is also like psychological counseling in that it is short-term, in contrast to long-term psychoanalytic therapy. It deals with short-term stresses arising from situational or maturational life crises, and it is considered "effective to the extent that it helps a person increase his or her ability to relate in ways that satisfy basic personality needs," as Struminski writes. Yet pastoral counseling is also pastoral.

**When Pastoral Counseling Is Pastoral.** Counseling and pastoral counseling are connected. Pastoral counseling incorporates the use of religious and spiritual resources with counseling resources. In other words, according to Struminski, it becomes counseling "when the focus of the helping relationship is more on solving problems or effecting better personal integration and adjustment in the process of human maturation."

Pastoral counseling is also pastoral when the counselor comes from a faith perspective in his or her life and "is a religiously integrated person . . . who approaches others with a sense of mystery . . . along with an ability to enter into communion with others in a therapeutic alliance . . . with the goal of reconciliation and personal religious integration," to quote Barry Estadt, author of the book *Pastoral Counseling*.

Originally, one notion of pastoral was that the spiritual helper was a male priest or minister. In the Roman Catholic tradition, this came out of the notion that a person came to share problems within the context of confession. Today, the church community has matured to more inclusivity; pastoral counselors can be nonordained ministers and women. Now the focus in pastoral counseling is no longer on the male formal minister in the church, but rather on the spiritually integrated helper—male or female, ordained or lay—who has training for this ministry.

Pastoral counseling, as a specific type of pastoral care, is a facilitating relationship between counselor,

client, and God, "God being the eminent 'Third Party,'" as Rossi observes. Pastoral counseling integrates the vertical dimension of a person's life with the horizontal; faith is not just intellectual assent but heartfelt confidence and trust.

Thus, the primary focus of attention in pastoral counseling is "to assist the normal believer in achieving a more wholesome life lived in faith" (Rossi) by helping the person overcome the problems and obstacles that impede progress in becoming all that the Body of God, the faith community, calls him or her to be.

In pastoral counseling, the shift in attention is from primary absorption with self (as could be the case in psychological counseling) to an emphasis on the relational dimension within a faith perspective. Ashbrook writes, "Pastoral counseling always takes place within the wider context of our relatedness with others. None of us is a person until we have been called forth by the responsiveness of others."

## RECONCILIATION IS INVOLVED

Within a faith perspective, pastoral counseling is reconciliation with self, God, and neighbor, as highlighted in Luke 10:25–28, when the lawyer asks Jesus what he has to do to gain eternal life. The lawyer can tell Jesus what the text says: "You are to love God with your whole heart and soul, your whole mind, your whole being, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus tells the lawyer that he has answered correctly, then simply says, "Now go and do it, and you shall live."

In pastoral counseling, the counselor invites the client to reconciliation with self, God, and neighbor during times of turbulence, crisis, and conflict. The client calls out like Peter, when the fear of drowning is near: "Save us, we perish" (Mark 4:35–41). "In the ministry of pastoral counseling," Estadt writes, "the counselor responds to calls for help from individuals immersed in life's squalls" without being drawn into the struggle, the undertow.

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction has everything to do with wholeness and holiness. In some ways it is akin to pastoral counseling as well as psychological counseling. "It is not psychotherapy or counseling, nor is it easily identified with ordinary religious or even pastoral counseling," Gratton notes, "yet it seems to have a natural affinity for these disciplines."

What is spiritual direction? Spiritual direction is all about sharing one's spiritual growth and its metanoia of going deeper, soul searching, and uncovering as



one strengthens one's relationship with God. Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, authors of the book *Urgings of the Heart*, describe spirituality as "a lifelong fidelity to an inner call."

Spiritual direction is the occasion to meet with another person in order to look at one's prayer life and how it interfaces with how one is living one's life. It is the opportunity to ask oneself a twofold question: "How is God speaking to me in these people, circumstances, and events, and how do I want to speak to God about these?" In so answering this question in an ongoing way, the person gets glimmers of how uniquely God calls him or her.

The role of the person accompanying another in this way is critical. Because spiritual direction is not about problem solving, there is a discipline involved in keeping with the primary focus of attention in spiritual direction: Where is God, and where am I, in all this "stuff" of my life? "Spiritual directors help people deepen their union with God by increasing their awareness of God's presence in themselves, others, and the world at large," Cavanaugh writes. Through a covenantal relationship with another person, the directee looks at his or her life experiences from a faith perspective of, What is God saying here?

Spiritual direction is a continuous journey. It is not short-term-crisis problem solving, nor is it long-term therapy. In many instances, however, the person who initially seeks spiritual direction may come because of a precipitating problem or crisis and, according to Gratton, "often . . . has only a vague idea of what to expect from spiritual direction." At the same time, some see it as a type of soul friendship for the more mature faith journeyer, who already has a spiritual life from which he or she consciously and reflectively lives everyday life. As William A. Barry puts it in his book *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry*, "The major role of the spiritual director is . . . to help directees pay attention to their experiences as the locus of their encounter with God."

## BODY OF CHRIST

Spiritual direction, as Leech notes, is "firmly located within . . . the common life of the Body of Christ." The directee seeks wholeness and holiness not as ends in themselves but as the distillation of his or her earnest struggle to love and see with new eyes. Spiritual direction helps to bring front and center this desire to love, so that directees can, as Angelo M. Caligiuri writes in a 1978 *Review for Religious* article, be present to "God's spirit in their lives [which] will make them more present to the same spirit at work

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**Spiritual direction is all about sharing one's spiritual growth and its metanoia of going deeper, soul searching, and uncovering as one strengthens one's relationship with God**

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in the lives of those they meet and in the world around them." Through dialogue with a faith journeyer about one's relationship with God as evident in one's daily life, the directee focuses on how God is speaking in these experiences.

It is critical that the spiritual director not get in the way of the directee's relationship with God by an overemphasis on problem solving and advice giving, which are more specific to counseling. The spiritual director must be aware that God is inviting the person to deeper purity of heart, freedom, and integrity, which then overflow in love of neighbor in the faith community. In *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, coauthors William A. Barry and William A. Connolly write that "the focus . . . of spiritual direction is on . . . religious experience . . . of the Mysterious Other whom we call God." It is critical that the spiritual director be able "to set the individual directees free to follow the unique path along which God is leading each one," as Steve R. Wigall notes in the article "What Is a Spiritual Director's Authority?" (*Review for Religious*, July/August 1997).

All of this may make spiritual direction seem like something esoteric. On the contrary; it is simply intended to show how important it is to delineate the specific focus of spiritual direction so that both director and directee can be more centered and more accountable. "It is the responsibility of the director," writes Gratton, "to be aware of the nuances that differentiate spiritual direction from its psychological, pastoral and ethical look-alikes."



Another way to look at this, as Rossi suggests, is to see counseling as psyche-centered, pastoral counseling as problem-centered, and spiritual direction as "soul"/spirituality-centered. In *Hidden Spring: The Spiritual Dimension of Therapy*, Thomas Hart observes that "spiritual direction takes place in the context of a mutually shared faith vision, where therapy might not."

The ideal is that anyone coming for spiritual direction has already sensed a touch of the "more than," which has come from deep within, not only from problems and crisis experiences. Spiritual direction is bigger than any one particular area of one's life. "The purpose of direction," Hart writes in *The Art of Christian Listening*, "will be to sensitize people further to the presence and action of God in their lives and to assist them to make a fuller and more appropriate response to it."

## FALSE IMPRESSION WIDESPREAD

Spiritual direction has received some bad press for a number of reasons. First, there has been a sense that direction is for the spiritual elite, which some erroneously translate as priests and religious brothers and sisters. Some laypeople have been hesitant to consider undergoing spiritual direction because they see themselves as not holy enough or knowledgeable enough. This may largely be the result of the seemingly hierarchical elitism fostered in many Roman Catholic settings, where the "holiness" order, from top down, is perceived as follows: priest, brother, sister, married layperson, single layperson.

Historically, spiritual direction was seen as a context for dealing with one's sinfulness in confession. For this reason, the word *direction* has been used by many ever since, even though it has moved beyond the context of the Roman Catholic church and, for that matter, beyond the Catholic tradition itself and into other religious denominations.

In addition, laypeople, in the early stages of spiritual direction, have been hesitant to consider that they might be called to be spiritual directors. Essentially, spiritual direction is a charism in which people are called forth for their gifts of listening and discernment, and these gifts are certainly not confined to one specific group of people. In many instances, spiritual directors are called forth by others who see them as possessing the characteristics of a soul friend. Yet because of the complexity of many issues today, this is not enough. "For years now, the training and certification of spiritual guides and of those who educate them has been an issue of increasing importance," Gratton contends. It is my personal stance that this charism must be fine-tuned through

appropriate and adequate training.

Another reason spiritual direction has received "bad press" is that many of us are more comfortable with externals—or "conventional wisdom," as John Shea calls it in his book *Gospel Light: Jesus Stories for Spiritual Consciousness*—and less comfortable with our spiritual depth. Thus, talking about God in our lives is not considered profitable, because we are constantly distracted by what is going on around us and may have a limited awareness of how God is working within. We may not be reflective about "the presence and action of God in our lives," as Thomas Hart puts it. Because of this, then, we may shy away from the type of growth relationship that spiritual direction represents.

In *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction*, Gerald May notes that *spiritual direction* seems to be an "archaic term that has seen considerable misuse, and . . . there has been trouble with its authoritarian connotations." It has seemed, for some, to be very much based on a medical or spiritual "expert" model, although "a correct understanding considers a director not as one who gives orders but rather as one who points directions." No matter. If we accept that language is a symbol system that bespeaks our reality, then we can acknowledge that *director* is more in sync with a hierarchical model than other names—for example, *accompanier* or *soul friend*.

In fact, as Barry and Connolly point out, the term *spiritual direction* unavoidably suggests to people of our contemporary Western culture a spiritualism and authoritarianism that sound theology and psychology must repudiate. In an article titled "On Entering Spiritual Direction" (*Review for Religious*, 1997), Shaun McCarty writes, "Both words, 'spiritual' and 'direction,' can be misleading. Spiritual direction is not 'spiritual' in the sense that it is concerned with life of the spirit . . . as somehow disengaged from mind and body. . . . Nor is spiritual direction 'direction' in the sense of being overly directive. . . . The director does not tell people who they should be or what they should be."

One of the challenges of the term *spiritual direction* is that many people come to it with rather vague notions of what it means and what the role of the spiritual director is. In a 1994 *Review for Religious* article on "The Future of Spiritual Direction," Tad Dunne observes that "people who need spiritual guidance often have no idea what spiritual direction is, and even when they do, their only way to find a good director is by word of mouth."

## NEW SCHOOLS

May writes that since Vatican Council II, "a number of new 'schools' of spiritual direction have been



founded and refined in this modern struggle through the confusion." These schools have included the contemplative, those emphasizing the kataphatic (images, symbols, words, imagination) or the apophatic (silence, wordlessness: "Be still and know that I am God," Ps. 46:10), and approaches focused on scripture, social justice, discernment of spirits, and dreams, to name just a few.

In addition, there has been a shift away from the *spiritual direction* appellation to alternatives, including *spiritual accompaniment* (my personal preference), *copilgrimage*, and *spiritual journeying*. Although some traditions, like the Ignatian tradition, still hold to the terms *spiritual direction* and *director*, names for the person facilitating the process are slowly beginning to change elsewhere and include *soul mate*, *guru*, *shaman*, *soul friend*, *mentor*, *abba*, and *amma*.

## BALANCED ATTITUDE

Having looked at the nuances of therapy and counseling, and having focused on how pastoral counseling is different from other counseling, we should note that because of a lack of clarity, many have seen counseling, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction as somewhat synonymous. In the confusion, "there was a time when psychological phenomena were seen only in spiritual terms," May writes. "Then we went through a period in which spirituality was often seen in psychological terms."

In highlighting the variations on the theme of wholeness and holiness through the lens of the primary focus of attention of each mode of helping, it becomes clear that the challenge for helpers is to be more deliberate about what they are qualified to offer. Likewise, those looking for help must also be more deliberate about what they seek. If the distinctions among the types of help are not clear for those seeking assistance, it is the responsibility of those offering the help to educate those who come to them.

This is not to say that these helps don't overlap each other. Anyone who has functioned in more than one of these roles, or in any combination thereof, knows otherwise. Obviously, as noted throughout this article, people are a gestalt of body, mind, and spirit, and in many ways cannot be compartmentalized. Individuals entering spiritual direction do have psychological issues (and also physical concerns) that affect their spirituality. "To attempt too strict a separation, to try to drive mind from spirit, would be artificial and not at all helpful," says May. "To look to the spirit without also addressing the mind is as absurd as caring for the mind without attending to physical health."

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I have suggested that the real distinctions among psychological counseling, pastoral counseling, and spiritual accompaniment lie in the primary focus of attention of each. At the same time, as Rossi emphasizes, "the work of one should be integrated with that of the other" by people with training in each of these areas, or by the same person if he or she has the requisite training.

I caution against blurring the foci of these professions/ministries with the notion that it is important to deal with the person holistically. Doing so would be a disservice to both the helper and the one helped. For example, May observes, "turning spiritual direction into a form of pastoral-psychological counseling . . . misses the spiritual mark . . . in which mental and emotional concerns may kidnap the gentle spiritual attentiveness required of both director and directee."

On the other hand, Cavanagh writes, "pastoral counselors must have a clear definition of their role so that they do not fall into roles that are at best unhelpful and at worst harmful. Someone who is acting as a pastoral counselor should not attempt to be a regular counselor, a general pastoral minister, or a spiritual director" unless he or she has the appropriate training and makes that clear to those seeking help. Such a counselor would function, then, in a particular role of bridging, and we would need to name such help differently.

In psychological counseling, and in psychotherapy in particular, the primary focus of attention is resolution of psychic conflict and adjustment to society,



with emphasis on the mental and emotional dimensions. It consists of “mind-talk.” In pastoral counseling, the primary focus of attention is the healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guiding of the person within a faith context, but with the emphasis still on “mind-talk.” In spiritual direction, the primary focus of attention is being and becoming in God. The emphasis is “God-talk”—that is, life experiences are framed within the context of “What is God saying to me?” and “What do I want to say to God?”

## BRIDGING COMMON TODAY

Bridging is being done more today by people who have training in at least two of the helping professions or ministries and may function in both roles. Like anything else, religion and spirituality can contribute to or preserve dependency and immaturity, which impede rather than promote growth. They can become a crutch, as when they become something like magic in the extreme: “Pray and the problem will go away.” This is not to downplay the importance of faith in God’s beneficence or prayer as integral to one’s life. Rather, it is to point out that religion and spirituality can camouflage significant issues in one’s life and, as Leech writes, “may not further any healing process but rather increase sickness.” The other extreme is to reject religion and spirituality as pathological, which Freud did with his therapy clients.

The person who offers two or more of these helps is in a position to determine what sequence or combination of these helps is appropriate for the individual seeking assistance. As noted earlier, the root words for both *salvation* and *healing* are the same. The goal of therapy is to foster liberation from inner and outer conflicts. In some ways, that is the goal of spirituality as it is focused in pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. “In the end,” Hart asks, “are there not ample grounds for spirituality and psychology to be good friends and collaborators? . . . When psychotherapy and spirituality are both sound, they are united in their goal of promoting human well-being.”

Psychologists who have bridged their counseling/therapeutic profession with spirituality are Carl Jung, Victor Frankl, Abraham Maslow, and Gerald May. Jung’s openness, writes Hart, was “not in the God out there but in the God in here, the God of the religious experience, the God of the psyche.” Frankl, after his harrowing experiences in a World War II German concentration camp, developed the system he called logotherapy, in which he emphasized that ultimately, it is only a transcendent meaning that remains in the vagaries of life. Likewise, with self-actualization as the climax of human needs, Maslow il-

lustrates that it opens up to the kenosis and metanoia of self-transcendence and spiritual values.

Hart, with training both as a therapist and a theologian, gives example after example, in his book *Hidden Spring*, of what this bridging looks like. In lucid explanations and case studies, he illustrates how “therapy and spirituality blend in the process.” At the end of one of his case studies, he asks whether the work he has done with a particular client would be called therapy or spiritual direction, and then responds, “I think it could appropriately be called either, because it is both.” Does all this indicate that these fields have evolved to the point that we need new terminology for such bridging?

In the late 1950s Frank Lake founded a movement called Clinical Theology, which focused on a synthesis of theology and psychiatry, using writings by such authors as John of the Cross, Simone Weil, and Martin Buber. As Leech explains, with his belief in the indwelling of God in each person, Lake saw “no awkward transition . . . from the ‘psychology’ to the ‘spirituality’ of a person.” He saw clinical theology as different from spiritual direction in that it focused on such psychological problems as depression, yet contextualized them within a theological framework.

## QUALIFICATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL

Today, as never before, responsibility and accountability are at the fore in the helping professions; malpractice litigation, justified or not, is a reality. “The time-honored job of guiding people through depression, marital problems and family upheavals has turned into a minefield,” Lisa Miller writes in a 1998 *Wall Street Journal* article. In 1990 American clergy assisted 40 percent of those seeking help for mental-health needs because of the stigma of going to a psychiatrist and the factor of gratis service. Miller notes that clergy have provided this help even though “the majority are not qualified or certified to handle the complicated issues of ‘transference’ that can entangle longer-term relationships.”

Do we need to move to the stance of making spiritual direction a recognized discipline, like psychological and pastoral counseling, with requisite training and establishment of competencies before setting up a practice? What would an association of spiritual accompaniers, recognizing different modes of training and different spiritualities (in contrast to today’s focus on primarily Ignatian training and methodology), look like? How would standards be determined and upheld?

What term(s) might we use to more adequately indicate the primary focus of attention for spiritual direction and help reverse the negative image it has



acquired because of the hierarchical, elitist connotations of its present appellation? What about a publication for spiritual accompaniers, highlighting salient issues, including varied approaches to prayer and spiritual accompaniment and interdisciplinary themes?

Has the time come, in spiritual direction, to “set normal fees and define preferable ways of payment,” as Dunne suggests? Because spiritual direction has been a gratis service, Barry and Connolly observe, it seems that many people have sought it out for that very reason, even though they may have instead needed psychological or pastoral counseling. Unfortunately, spiritual directors not trained in therapy or counseling, yet “counseling” these people, may have inadvertently contributed to many of today’s problems.

Making spiritual direction a discipline, without undermining its also being a charism, would make it more credible. It would allow spiritual direction to be seen as a help for holiness and wholeness, with a primary focus of attention for which certain people are specifically trained. I suggest that we must move away from the stance that spiritual direction is an either/or: either a charism that would be sullied by fee for service or a discipline with training, standards, and fees like other professions. I suggest that there is a need for a paradigm shift in which we see spiritual direction—under a different appellation—as both.

Gratton writes, “Demanding more than mere goodwill and desire to fill the role of ‘wise guide,’ [spiritual direction] presumes a certain well-defined ‘call’ and a degree of reliable professional training that till recently has not been available for many people in many places.” What we must work toward in a new paradigm is a focus in which “the charism and the responsibility of spiritual direction support and enhance one another,” as Lucy Abbott Tucker writes in an article on “Professionalization: Spiritual Directors at the Edge” (*The Way*, 1998).

In justice, then, the fee for service would be a given. Those who are both gifted and trained would be able to work in the field because they would be able to “make a living.” Tucker, a married woman and a spiritual director, says it well: “I know of no spiritual director who is in this ministry ‘for the money.’ I know many spiritual directors who struggle with the desire to remain faithful to their call while maintaining financial viability in the world.”

Otherwise, the field can become filled with people looking for a third or fourth profession or ministry, or clerics—most of whom may be both untrained and ungifted in spiritual direction. Such people, without specific training or aptitude, may decide to hang out their shingles and offer a gratis service, which sabotages those trained and gifted people who are requesting a just wage for their services.

Now may be the season, in our church settings, for consciousness raising and education stressing that charging a fee for spiritual direction in no way diminishes it as a God-given gift. Rather, it highlights the necessity of nurturing such a gift with specific training. This is the reality for many other professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, musicians): people have gifts for certain things, and their use of these gifts is enhanced by training and standards.

One who offers therapy/counseling, pastoral counseling, or spiritual direction must be both trained and clear in his or her own heart and soul about the primary focus of attention in his or her profession or ministry. Ideally, this clarity becomes a way of being for the helper, so that it is clearly communicated to the person coming for help. As noted throughout this article, the issue of how psychology and spirituality relate is a critical one that we must address. The time has come for us to help and challenge each other in consciousness raising for responsibility and accountability. Yes, the time is now.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Barry, W., and W. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1986.
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# A Priest's Discernment

*Reverend William P. Sheridan, M.Div.*

I have had dinner, on separate occasions, with several priest friends lately. Each of these events had one thing in common: each priest with whom I dined asked me, "Why do you stay?" That is, why do I stay a priest? Why do I remain in the active ministry? To be quite honest, I was a bit put off by the question when it was posed to me. I had been talking to these priests about my ministry. In discussing some of the difficulties I was encountering, I had voiced disappointment, anger, and anxiety. So when these priests asked me, "Why do you stay?" my immediate response was one of fear. Had I said too much? Had I not been clear? Were my brothers seeing something that I was not perceiving? Was I in such bad shape that people close to me were wondering what I was doing with my life? The simple fact, however, was that I was fearful because deep down inside, I was asking myself the same question.

Even to entertain reevaluating my vocation was to give the question a power over me that I did not want it to have. To ask the question meant returning, in a sense, to my seminary days of discernment. "Wait a minute," I told myself. "Vocational discernment was what preceded the decision to enter the seminary." Vocational discernment was something that ended in commitment. I was revisiting discernment of my vocation, and the thought left me cold. I had "been

there, done that" and had no intention of reentering the discernment grind.

In her novel *Offshore*, Penelope Fitzgerald has one of her characters state, "Decision is torment for anyone with imagination. When you decide, you multiply the things you might have done and now never can." I told myself that to rediscern my vocation would indeed be torment. Perhaps I was mourning the things I might have done and now never could. Yes, Fitzgerald had it right—decision is torment.

When I knelt before the archbishop to be ordained almost eleven years ago, I never thought I would be confronted by the uncomfortable prospect of having every Eucharist I presided at become a challenge to my authenticity, each confession I heard a call to enter my own hollow places. Lamenting these realities did not make them go away. I was clearly in need of a closer look at my priesthood, but I was less clear about how to do it. The longer I reflected on it, however, the more I realized that I really needed to revisit my definition of discernment. Perhaps vocational discernment was not solely limited to seminary formation and done prior to a commitment. Maybe the need to continually discern one's vocation was a consistent part of discipleship.

After all, seminary discernment was geared toward whether one was called to be a priest. Might priestly



discernment be possible and qualitatively different? Seminary discernment is facilitated by faculty, staff, and administrative personnel focused on providing the environment for individual seminarians to discern their call. Once ordained, a priest must forge his own environment for discernment. Seminary discernment tends to be more solitary and introspective. Priestly discernment takes place from within the often busy ministerial situation. Discernment in a seminary is aided by institutional and structural insistence on embracing the principles of prayer, listening, and reflection. Discernment in the ministry is often made difficult by demands on the priest's time, the needs of others, and the fact that it rests on the priest's own initiative.

I began to see that a return to my definition of discernment was not just a good idea but a necessity. Of course, I realize that discernment is a part of many everyday decisions, as the contributions of Saint Ignatius Loyola make very clear. In this article, I turn more specifically to the priest's continuing discernment of his call to priesthood.

Upon closer scrutiny, I also began to see that there is a fundamental difference between asking "Why do I stay?" and asking "Why don't I leave?" My friends had, in fact, put the emphasis on the staying, not on the possibility of leaving. It occurs to me that at all the times when I have wrestled with the priestly commitment, I have never had more than a general idea of what my life would be like outside the priesthood. Priesthood has become the context from within which I have addressed the question. Having stated this, however, I should also note that the torment of which Penelope Fitzgerald spoke was no less present. Perhaps this context simply rephrased the question as "How do I stay?"

## LIVING IN THE QUESTION

A friend gave me a book for Christmas entitled *Living in the Question: Meditations in the Style of Lectio Divina* by M. Basil Pennington. The author quotes the great poet/philosopher Rainer Maria Rilke:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not seek the answers that cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them—and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

This "living in the question" is at the heart of priestly discernment. Grasping the reality that one has questions to face is one thing; learning to love the

questions themselves is quite another. This apparent contradiction is what brings meaning to the priestly struggle to discern, rediscover, and discern again.

The need to continually discern his vocation is part of the ongoing formation of every priest. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on priesthood and vocations, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II refers to priestly discernment as a "vocation within the priesthood." He writes,

The priest then gives his response, in faith, to Jesus' call: "I am coming, to follow you." From this moment there begins that response which, as a fundamental choice, must be expressed anew and reaffirmed through the years of his priesthood in countless other responses, all of them rooted in and enlivened by that "yes" of Holy Orders. In this sense, one can speak of a vocation "within" the priesthood. The fact is that God continues to call and send forth, revealing His plan in the historical development of the priest's life and the life of the Church and of society. It is in this perspective that the meaning of ongoing formation emerges. Permanent formation is necessary in order to discern and follow this constant call or will of God.

This is in keeping with what the pope called "Gospel discernment" earlier in the exhortation. Everyday experiences and challenges are the locus for priestly discernment.

I would maintain that priestly discernment will primarily emerge from within three of the priest's fundamental relationships: his relationship to himself, his relationship to others, and his relationship to God. As my sixth-grade Confraternity of Christian Doctrine teacher, Sister Theresa Marie, told us, "There can be no real spirituality without the triangle of you, others, and God." Discernment will manifest itself through the priest's commitment to authenticity and his integrity in living his vocation.

## RELATIONSHIP TO SELF

The longer I am a priest, the better I understand the truth that all spiritual growth rests on one's ability to be honest. Getting in touch with one's motivations and intentions is absolutely essential to spirituality, pastoral ministry, and personal integration. Interactions with one's coworkers in the ministry and in personal relationships pivot on the ability to be honest with oneself. Much of a priest's contentment rides on how his desires and ambitions take shape. In their work entitled *Grace Under Pressure: What Gives Life to American Priests—A Study of Effective Priests Ordained Ten to Thirty Years*, James Walsh and co-authors count personal honesty among the most important attributes of effective priests:



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## Discernment, in the ministerial context, often means abandoning oneself to mystery and abiding “blindfolded” in Jesus

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Over and over again, the priests in our focus groups talked about the need to be honest with themselves and with others. These priests want to be themselves. They don't want to just “go through the motions.” They are willing to look at themselves honestly. They see their strengths but also their weaknesses and challenges as clearly as they see anything else.

Seeing, and I might add hearing, clearly enables good discernment. I have been a part of enough conversations with brother priests, religious, parishioners, and friends to know that being honest about what I am thinking and feeling is crucial to the progress of the dialogue. Conversations regarding ministry, administrative decisions, commitment, and celibacy require honesty. I have found that what developed into disagreements with coworkers often started with my own inability to let go of preconceived intentions for the project (and vice versa). There have been times when I, or those with whom I minister, have been blinded by personal agendas that are left veiled. Once uncovered, however, those agendas helped all involved to reassess the direction of things. This is no easy endeavor. I have not particularly relished the occasions on which I have been called to task by coworkers or others, but I do know that being honest has helped me sort through them.

When I am completely honest with myself, I know that a good deal of my struggle with celibacy stems from my tendency to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. The celibate commitment is particularly susceptible to what Penelope

Fitzgerald calls the tendency “to multiply the things you might have done.” I do not state this to minimize the real questions confronting the church on this issue, but only to relate my own struggle to integrate the celibate commitment. For me, my desire to marry, when whittled down, has less to do with my eagerness to enter a life-giving, committed relationship with a woman (and all that this entails) and more to do with my loneliness, unmet emotional needs and, at times, just plain lust. I know that this may not be the case for others, and discerning the celibate commitment will look different for them. One thing is certain: only through being truly honest with oneself will a real answer emerge.

Spiritual direction is an integral component to priestly discernment because it helps one plumb the depths of honesty. Spiritual direction gives voice to one's inner desires, longings, motivations, and intentions. I do not know how continuing discernment is possible without honest spiritual direction. It is all too easy and all too dangerous to deceive oneself. Good spiritual direction confronts one's exterior words, behaviors, and attitudes with the interior presence of the Holy Spirit. It helps one embrace the “hidden self.” According to Frank J. Houdek, author of *Guided by the Spirit: A Jesuit Perspective on Spiritual Direction*, the process of spiritual direction encompasses two basic realities: prayer and spiritual discernment. Prayer is at the heart of priestly discernment, but it must be honest prayer. Spiritual direction can help keep one honest. In their book *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, William A. Barry and William J. Connolly write,

One of the major criteria for the authenticity of our prayer and our lives is, “Is the dialogue working?” In other words, “Do I have something to say to the Lord that means something to me? Is He somehow communicating to me something that seems to mean something to Him?” If these questions cannot be answered affirmatively, the person would do well to ask the Lord what has gone wrong. “Is there something you want to say to me that I don't want to hear? Or is there something I don't want to tell you?” By paying attention to the quality of the dialogue the person can learn to become more and more transparent with God. The procedure could not be simpler.

Spiritual direction, when entered into freely and honestly, can help enable such a dialogue. My own experience has taught me that I need spiritual direction to be attentive to the dialogue amid the demanding and sometimes chaotic events of daily life. Spiritual direction helps me to “live in the question.” Spiritual direction gives shape to the question “How do I stay?”



## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

For the priest, relationships to others take many forms: relationships to those in authority; to those with, and to whom, he ministers; fraternal relationships; friendships; familial relationships. All play an important role in how a priest conducts his personal discernment, because they occupy the bulk of his time and energy. The ministry of the priest floats consistently in and out of these relationships. Obviously, a priest is more than the collectivity of his ministry, but the ministry constitutes the frame and context of his experience. The fact that his ministry provides a basic reference for the priest's life means that it will strongly influence his discernment. If a priest is happy and content in the ministry, this will spill over into his relationships with others.

It is not all that difficult to recognize the interrelationship between ministerial satisfaction and personal contentment. The priest may find it easier to discern God's call when the ministry reflects God's face. When the ministry speaks to the priest of God's presence, discernment is a relatively smooth process. What if the ministry is chaotic and confusing? What if the events of daily ministry grow mechanical? What if it becomes difficult to find God in the ministerial context? What if the needs and demands of others become so overwhelming that the priest is unable to reflect on his own experience? Then what happens to the need to continually discern? Given the decrease in the numbers of priestly vocations and the strain placed on active priests because some have retired or left the active ministry, are not most priests confronted with growing demands on their time and energy? This truly is the state of today's ministerial priesthood. Many priests feel caught in a ministerial crunch.

When situated in the ministerial crunch, many priests find it difficult to see meaning in their work. Endless ministerial functioning leaves little room, and even less time, for personal integration of experience. One such experience occurred for me at 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday, January 19, 2000. I was awakened by the director of campus ministry at Seton Hall University (where I serve as associate director of campus ministry and spiritual director of the college seminary). He had called to advise me of a fire in Boland Hall, a freshmen residence hall on campus. "Three students are dead, Bill, and we have about sixty students in area hospitals," he said. "You are needed on campus immediately." This tragic event guided much of my life in the months to follow. A seemingly constant flow of students, parents, faculty, and administrative staff wandered in and out of our offices, seeking meaning, consolation, and hope.

Those were difficult days of ministry.

With little time to truly discern God's presence and call in my life during that time of crisis, and even long after it, I drifted through what seemed to be a dark night of my ministry. How could I hope to bring meaning to something, for others, that I could not even remotely comprehend myself? It seemed that all of us at the university were being called to embrace our motto, *Hazard Zet Forward* (Danger Yet Onward), without the felt presence of God. Knowing in one's mind or intellect that God is present and feeling it in one's heart are two different realities. We as a community needed to plod through the darkness, trusting in the light, although we could not see it. I think this is an important paradigm for priestly ministry at times. My example concerns a time of crisis, but I firmly believe that it is applicable to any of the events of everyday ministry that leaves us tired, frustrated, and feeling disconnected. Many priests see and hear things in the course of their ministry that they would rather not encounter. It does not have to be death and despair that lead us into the dark night. Sometimes it is simply being misunderstood or taken for granted.

The danger to priests ministering through the darkness, whether it be during a time of crisis or in the everyday events of ministry, is the yielding to the temptation to create our own consolations when we perceive no consolations at prayer or in the ministry. I thank God that he provided me with caring people, solicitous brother priests, and a loving family to help offset the awful feelings of emptiness, abandonment, and anger that followed the fire. The temptation to close in on myself to seek consolation was great. An unhealthy turn to the self, however, just brings more darkness. The only way out of the darkness is to turn to the light of Christ. This turning toward Christ, however, does not necessarily mean "feeling better"; it simply means being more rooted in Jesus. In her marvelous book *Ascent to Love: The Spiritual Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, Ruth Burrows likens the "dark night" to abiding "blindfolded" in Jesus:

John of the Cross's doctrine (how aptly he is named!) is thoroughly Christocentric. It would make no sense whatever without this vision of Jesus crucified, at once the expression of human transcendence and the self-expending love of God. Only this makes sense of the way of abnegation he demands, of the darkness in which we find ourselves. He is showing us how to enter into this mystery of mutual surrender. He would have us lay aside our own desires, our own ideas and visions, our own will, and abide "blindfolded" in Jesus, content to be ignorant and helpless, trusting ourselves to Jesus who sees the Father, who truly knows Him as He is in Himself. It is the very love of the Father that pressed Jesus to die for love of us; His heart was beating with



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## The intention to pray can be thwarted by overly busy schedules and the mounting responsibilities of being pastorally attentive

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the Father's love. This is what we must long for, this selfless love of Jesus. Jesus crucified is the dark night into which we must enter so as to be one with God. We must allow ourselves to be drawn into mystery.

Allowing oneself to be "drawn into mystery" requires surrendering to the loving presence of God. Discernment, in the ministerial context, often means abandoning oneself to mystery and abiding "blindfolded" in Jesus. That act conforms to John Paul II's "Gospel discernment" and Rilke's "living in the question." Amid the desolations and consolations of ministry, the priest is called to deeper trust in Jesus Christ.

### RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

There can be no more important relationship than one's relationship to God. The substance of this relationship is the content of prayer. Prayer enables one to enter into intimate communion with God. Prayer energizes one's attempt to live the gospel and embrace its dynamic vision. Prayer is at the very core of discipleship. Given the central place prayer holds in the life of believers, priests need to consistently pray and appreciate the significance that prayer has to their ministry.

Remaining disciplined at prayer is often easier said than done. The intention to pray can be thwarted by overly busy schedules and the mounting responsibilities of being pastorally attentive. As Gisbert Greshake relates in his book *The Meaning of Christian*

*Priesthood*, priests may too easily yield to a "my work is a prayer" disposition. Although there is some merit to the notion of finding ministry prayerful, the priest must take personal quiet time for communion with the Lord to remain balanced. The desire to be extremely active, present, and functional in the priesthood is too grave a temptation. Greshake asserts that "a personal relationship requires personal prayer—and this can be very demanding: in prayer the believer experiences not only the loving nearness of God, but also that He seems to be absent and hidden." It is when God appears "absent and hidden" that the seeker begins to lose heart. It is when prayer becomes burdensome that the priest may be at risk. Greshake writes that

inevitably, a point comes when we feel we cannot bear prayer, silence, and aloneness. We realize that achievement, action, talking, making a noise, dwelling on our own thoughts, wishes, and imagination, are much more congenial than prayer, recollection, and silent waiting in the presence of God. Prayer, in a word, is dissatisfying. And already there is the strong temptation to abandon it and to spend the time in doing other, "more sensible" things, activities which produce more results—instead of kneeling silent and unsatisfied before God. . . . Many priests consequently say, "My work is a prayer!" and feel released from a burdensome duty: the necessary tension between prayer and work is resolved in favour of work.

How can the priest lead others to a personal relationship with God if he himself has abandoned the essential vehicle of transport? I know from personal experience that the "my work is a prayer" disposition only results in a priesthood absorbed in peripheral, functional, and exterior realities. Ministry, the very object of pastoral outreach, then begins to pound the priest into resentment and bitterness.

Finding time for personal prayer means pushing past the desire to have prayer "feel good." Prayer becomes stilted by the tendency to squeeze meaning out of it. It is only in the abandonment of oneself to the divine initiative and care that one is fed. I am coming to realize that the actual time of prayer, though arid, is what enables me to recognize God's presence at other times in the day. Whether it be in a child's smile and wave to me during the Preparation of the Gifts, in autumn trees lit to glorious color by the sun's rays, or in the tears of a young person seeking counsel, I know that God is with me. This acknowledgment of God's presence comes through prayer.

Priestly discernment is aided by an ability to see and hear things differently that comes through prayer. This was never more evident to me than on a Palm Sunday evening a few years ago. Our college



seminary community was gathering for its weekly *Lectio Divina* and Night Prayer. I must confess that after having presided at three Palm Sunday liturgies and visited the hospital, the last place I wanted to be was sitting in our chapel for *Lectio Divina*. I was not only tired; I was also a bit fed up with Lent. The Lenten season had been a strange one for me. I had been grappling with disparate scripture passages that had been sticking with me at prayer, and at other times, since Ash Wednesday. The voice at the beginning of Christ's public ministry (Mark 1:9–11), pieces of the psalms (Psalm 96:8–10), Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well (John 4:15–42), the story of the man born blind (John 9:1–41), and others would suddenly pop into my mind for no apparent reason. Even discussing them with my spiritual director rendered no meaning or insight.

Our scripture passage for communal *Lectio Divina* that evening was Mark 4:10–12, in which Jesus explains his use of parables by echoing the prophet Isaiah: "They may look and look, but never perceive; listen and listen, but never understand; to avoid changing their ways and being healed." This passage hit me like a bolt of lightning. It gave instant meaning to the disparate scripture passages that had been residing in my prayer since Ash Wednesday: each of those passages pertained to seeing or hearing. In addition, it gave me the realization that I had spent the better part of my existence not perceiving or understanding what God was about in my life. Far from being a sad or painful realization, however, it was truly a gift—a moment of enlightenment. I have subsequently come to understand that this seeing and hearing differently is what aids prayer, pastoral ministry, and priestly discernment: seeing strength in weakness and hearing hope in the presence of despair; seeing Jesus in all people and hearing his voice in their laughter and their cries.

In her novel entitled *The Farm She Was*, Ann Mohin tells the tale of an elderly woman named Reeni, living on a farm in upstate New York. Through the sights and sounds of rural life, Mohin paints a masterful picture of contemplation. Though Reeni does not consider herself in any way religious, she does believe that a higher presence is at work in the world. At several points throughout the novel, Reeni witnesses the dying of farm animals and is somewhat perplexed by the music she hears at the time of their death. She is relieved to find out that she is not the only person to hear music at death when her father

confesses that he too has had the experience. Mohin concludes the novel with Reeni's own experience of dying:

And then the laughter wells at the thought of anyone seeing me in my pale pink nightgown, laid out on the grass among the gravestones. It tickles me to tears. Joe [her dog] licks my face and I laugh with the joy of a totally free woman. It is when I sit up to catch my breath and wipe my eyes, that I hear it again—the music—and the final mystery is solved. It is a rattle in the throat perhaps, or a sign of faulty respiration, not a special sound after all, remarkable only because, like my father, I always seem to hear things differently than most.

Priestly discernment rests on the ability to see and hear things differently. Seeing and hearing things differently can assist the priest in reconciling apparent contradictions. Asking the Lord for the grace to see and hear as he would have us see and hear can aid the priest in accepting the way of paradox.

Sometimes the ministry exposes the priest to frightful sights and sounds. Sometimes the mounting responsibilities, growing tasks, and uncertainty strike fear for the future. As Ann Mohin reminds us, however, what may sound like a death rattle to one person may be the music of life to another. Priestly discernment, if it is to endow the priest with "staying" power, needs to hear and respond to this music.

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# Obsessive-Compulsive Ministers

*Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.*

**F**ather Martin Briggs is the recently appointed copastor of Saint Thomas Parish, the fictionalized central-city church setting for the now-defunct *Nothing Sacred* television series. Father Martin is a grim, no-nonsense cleric assigned by the diocese to shake up the parish team and to ensure that doctrine is not compromised in the parish. It is quite evident that he has ambitions for career advancement in the diocese and views Saint Thomas as a place where he can prove to the vicar and bishop that he has the ability to control and redeem what the diocese considers an "out of control" parish. His first order of business is to restrict nuns and lay people from preaching at liturgies. His next effort is to refocus the pastoral team's energy away from social action concerns, including their soup kitchen program, and toward more traditional concerns, such as religious education programming and a choir.

He emphasizes self-improvement to the pastoral team and takes to videotaping and reviewing his homilies to improve his technique. He quickly makes it known that he is a stickler for clerical protocol and liturgical rubric. While he is very concerned with pleasing the bishop and vicar, he appears to have little regard for the feedback of his peers and

subordinates. Not surprisingly, his leadership style is autocratic, and he resists efforts at team collaboration. Needless to say, Father Martin encounters strong resistance from the rest of the pastoral team.

His plan for shaking up the staff is to revise job descriptions so that those currently in some of those jobs won't easily qualify for reappointment. More specifically, he appears to be threatened by strong women like Sister Maureen, a vocal member of the pastoral staff, particularly because of her views on women's ordination, and he seems convinced that she must be replaced.

Sally Wingert is a 42-year-old director of religious education (DRE) for a moderate-size midwestern suburban parish. She is single and a former nun, with definite ideas about what children and adults need to know about their faith. In the two years she has held the position, she has gained the respect of most parishioners and other members of the parish team. While she manifests respect and deference toward the pastor, she evinces an aura of superiority over the rest of the pastoral team. She openly voices her opinions about the merit of the ideas and initiatives of other staff members. As the associate pastor once remarked, "Sally takes no hostages." The



permanent deacons and the school principal who have endured her critical appraisals would not disagree.

In short, she has cultivated a reputation for being a no-nonsense administrator who runs a tight ship. She is a tireless worker who puts in long hours and expects the same commitment from both paid and volunteer teachers and aides in her program. The only substantive complaint about her has come from some parents of adolescent girls in the high school Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program, who think the dress code she established for the program is too strict.

While parish staff and parishioners admire their DRE, no one feels particularly close to her, and she does not appear to have a social life that involves the parish. Nevertheless, it was totally unexpected when she submitted her letter of resignation in May, stating that she would pursue a masters in divinity degree "to prepare for the time when women will take their rightful place in ordained ministry."

## OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE PSYCHODYNAMICS

Both of these ministers exhibit obsessive-compulsive personality dynamics. In his book *Healers: Harmed and Harmful*, Conrad Weiser, Ph.D., a psychological consultant to ministry, observes that the ministry has traditionally attracted obsessive-compulsive individuals. However, he notes, this changed in the era of the 1960s through the 1980s, when civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and ecological concerns provided a ministry platform for narcissistic personalities, who in former days would probably not have considered a ministerial career. Today, however there seems to be a shift toward more obsessive-compulsivity and less narcissism in ministry.

Individuals with obsessive-compulsive personality are habitually preoccupied with rules and duties. Rules provide a sense of orderliness in their lives, as well as a measure of control. While obsessive-compulsivity is not necessarily synonymous with a conservative ideology, it is certainly not inconsistent with one. Following rules and the established order is comforting to this personality, as it confirms the view that the world functions best when there is order rather than chaos and when life is gentle and predictable rather than harsh and unpredictable.

People with obsessive-compulsive personality are unable to express warmth and caring, except in limited situations. They tend to believe that any spontaneous expression of emotion could be dangerous and that extreme expressions of emotion represent craziness. Therefore, they keep their feelings under control. Even their cognitive processes are attenuated

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and rigid, lacking a sense of playfulness and flexibility.

They are highly oriented toward a lifestyle characterized by productivity and efficiency, and they are temperamentally and emotionally insensitive to others. Competitiveness is not uncommon in individuals with this personality structure. They can be rather singleminded in their strivings, and when this combines with their righteousness, they can compete with a level of fury that is formidable. Obsessive individuals have a tendency to be perfectionists, which shows in their overattention to details, rules, and schedules. Not surprisingly, they are often workaholics.

Interpersonally, they are often polite and loyal, although somewhat rigid and stuffy in their dealings with others. While they are likely to show respect and deference—even to the point of obsequiousness—to superiors, they tend to show relatively little interest in collegiality with peers and those who report to them. They seldom delegate responsibilities for fear that the task will not be done properly. Accordingly, they are firm believers in the dictum "If you want it done right, do it yourself."

In Western culture, a certain degree of compulsivity in one's work is highly esteemed and rewarded by others. But for individuals with obsessive-compulsive personality, such cultural reinforcement becomes a burden and an invitation to workaholism. When these individuals are not working, they believe they are not being responsible and thus have little self-



worth. Therefore, they must always be doing something. They must take work home with them, and even when they are on vacation, they must at the very least stay in touch with their office by phone, fax, or e-mail. Since many obsessive-compulsives have also internalized the theologically ridiculous dictum "idleness is the devil's workshop," they also feel morally obliged to work compulsively.

Individuals with this personality disorder can be indecisive and poor planners of their time because of their narrow focus and concern with precision even when precision may be irrelevant. Indecisiveness can take several forms. Decision making may be postponed, avoided, or protracted. For example, an obsessive-compulsive individual may not finish an assignment because he or she has spent so much time ruminating about priorities.

Furthermore, these individuals are inclined to be overly conscientious and excessively moralistic and inflexible about matters of ethics, law, or values. Although they may generally seem to be mild-mannered individuals, they can become quite self-righteous and unpleasant when a pet idea or ideology of theirs is attacked.

They may find it difficult to be generous in donating money, time, or gifts to others when little or no personal gain will result. And they find it difficult to relinquish worn-out and worthless objects, even when those objects have no actual or sentimental value to them. Generosity is not a high priority for them; they believe in conserving everything they can. They may have large collections of books, records, or other items. They seem to have internalized the belief that it's better to save things for a rainy day than to be unprepared and unprotected.

When they were children, obsessive-compulsive individuals tended to receive parental training that taught them to be good and overly responsible in all areas of their life. The spoken and unspoken message they consistently received from their parents and caretakers—the parental injunction—was, "To be a worthwhile person, you must do and be better." Psychologically, they tend to believe, "I am always responsible if something goes wrong, so I must always be reliable, competent, and righteous." Typically, their worldview is, "Life is always unpredictable and expects too much of me." Their basic strategy in life, then, becomes "Always be in control, always be right, and always be proper." Unfortunately, such a life script is usually experienced as a mild to moderate challenge when things are going reasonably well, but always as a severely distressing and overwhelming burden when life is not going well. Finally, these individuals tend to be hyperalert to criticism and so can easily rationalize keeping an emotional distance from others.

Not surprisingly, these individuals experience excessive guilt feelings because of their internalized sense that they must assume tremendous amounts of responsibility. As a result, they are chronically anxious and tense, and seldom are able to look and feel relaxed. They are rarely spontaneous and almost never euphoric, and they cannot live comfortably in the present because of their fear of what the future may hold for them. So, they are always prepared—like good Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts—for the expected and the unexpected. Since they secretly doubt their ability to deal with the enormity of life, they reduce life to its smallest pieces. They believe that by managing these small pieces, they will eventually control the whole. Of course, it won't happen this way, because life cannot be controlled—but they religiously cling to this fiction. Thus, their lives tend to be characterized by a quiet sort of desperation, drabness, and worry.

## RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS

The religious and spiritual dynamics of obsessive-compulsive individuals, particularly ministers, are unique and rather predictable. These dynamics may be described in terms of the obsessive-compulsive person's image of God, prayer style, experience of conversion and vocation, religious behavior patterns, and ministry style.

Obsessive-compulsive individuals typically conceive of God as a taskmaster, judge, or police officer. Because their parents or caretakers expected them to be responsible and perfect in early life, they assume that God holds the same expectations of them. The belief is that God expects great things of them and will judge them accordingly. Certain scriptures further reinforce this expectation. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" and the parable of the talents tend to be interpreted literally by these individuals.

It should not be surprising that the prayer style of obsessive-compulsive individuals tends to focus on their own faults, failings, and need for forgiveness. They hear and say the words, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but speak the words and I shall be healed," but they can only allow themselves to believe the first part ("Lord, I am not worthy"); they find it almost impossible to believe that they can be healed and be worthy. They easily believe, and feel, that they are sinful and are not, and cannot become, lovable. The words "You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased" seem directed at others but could never refer to them. A marker that pastoral psychotherapists look for as obsessive-compulsive clients grow and mature is their increas-



ing acceptance of their status as God's "beloved."

As to the matter of vocation and conversion: In his clinical research, Conrad Weiser, Ph.D., has found that obsessive-compulsive ministers believe they are meant to do something important with their lives. They often report that when they were in their late teens or twenties, while on a retreat or at a church, it suddenly occurred to them that the Holy Spirit was calling them to the ministry. Such a divine calling is important for these individuals, since they believe that their work can be nearly anything but must be supremely important. They look outside themselves for a sense of direction or confirmation. Weiser notes, "Then God, or a cross, or a revered religious professional appears, and they conclude that God has somehow clarified the direction."

In their ministry, there are various ways obsessive-compulsive ministers function and behave. I will describe two levels of functioning: high and low.

**High-Functioning Compulsive Ministers.** These individuals tend to be regarded as highly effective in their ministries and may even be considered leaders in their field. They may win awards and get appointed to important committees and task forces, but for all their success, their lives are decidedly one-sided. In ministry circles, they are almost always viewed as overachievers and maybe even as leaders, but they are seldom viewed as friendly and caring persons. They tend to be somewhat emotionally immature and are seldom satisfied with their lives. Although they may extol the virtue of living in the moment, they seldom, if ever, take time to smell the roses. Their interpersonal relationships tend to be predictably remote and lacking in all but superficial intimacy. Yet they have some capacity for deeper intimate sharing and risk-taking if they can let down their intellectual defenses.

**Low-Functioning Compulsive Ministers.** Because of the extent of their inflexibility, perfectionism, and indecisiveness, they are rarely able to meet deadlines or be on time for appointments and meetings. Overwhelming guilt feelings can further complicate their ineffectiveness. For example, when they feel bad because they have let someone down, they may be too embarrassed to return phone calls or answer letters or e-mail messages. Not surprisingly, this lack of responsiveness compounds their original irresponsibility, resulting in their feeling even more ineffective and more guilty. Needless to say, these ministers are exceedingly frustrating to work with.

Paranoid features can also be present in low-functioning obsessive-compulsive ministers. Usually, this manifests as suspicion about others' intentions or

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as projected blame. Such a minister can become quite convinced that others are watching or checking to catch him or her making a mistake, or judging his or her personal behavior or ministerial performance. Needless to say, these individuals are not reliable and cannot be counted upon. Superiors and coworkers tend to label them as "difficult" people because of their perceived irresponsibility and lack of cooperativeness.

Under severe levels of stress, these low-functioning ministers can become obsessive about their specific ministry or religious matters in general. Initially, they can be filled with generalized anxiety. Then a recurrent thought or scriptural passage "convinces" them that they are spiritually lost because they have themselves crucified Christ. Or they think they have sinned against the Holy Spirit and thus cannot be forgiven. As a result, they become agitated and depressed and refuse any measure of reassurance and comfort. They are usually beyond rational persuasion and may be clinically depressed and entertain suicidal thoughts. Competent and compassionate pastoral care typically includes psychiatric referral, but it may also require changes in the policies and structure of the religious organizations to which these individuals belong.

## **SCRUPULOSITY IS RELATED**

While scrupulosity is commonly associated with the obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, it is actually a variant of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*



of *Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (DSM-IV), as an Axis I (symptom) disorder, rather than an Axis II (personality) disorder. Just as compulsive hand washing or repeated checking of a door lock are examples of OCD, repeated confession of the same sin—sometimes to several different confessors—is an example of scrupulosity.

**Characteristics of Scrupulosity.** Richard Vaughan, S.J., describes four basic characteristics of scrupulosity: an attempt to follow specific moral prescriptions perfectly; fear of eternal damnation, based on the belief of having committed serious sin; little or no concern for failures of human weakness, or venial sin; and sometimes, overwhelming anxiety, reducing the capacity to make a moral judgment as to the sinfulness of a given behavior. I would add a fifth: the scrupulosity causes marked distress, is time-consuming (i.e., takes more than one hour a day), or significantly interferes with the individual's daily routine and ministry or social functioning. In other words, there is a marked difference between someone who is concerned about sinfulness and confesses once, and someone who confesses a dozen or so times over three consecutive days. Only the second instance reflects full-blown scrupulosity.

Scrupulosity can be manifested in the reporting to a confessor, pastor, or religious superior tiny infractions of rules and instances of inappropriate behavior. But probably the most trying expression of an overscrupulous religiosity is seen in the interpretation of certain passages of scripture. Scrupulous individuals may focus on passages that they interpret according to their private biases, even though these passages point out clearly their worth as Christians. To them, any contradictory testimony in scripture, in church tradition, or from their spiritual directors is irrelevant. In years past, when weekly confession was a common practice among Catholics, overscrupulosity was unwittingly reinforced.

**OCD vs. Obsessive-Compulsive Personality.** While it is possible for a minister suffering from obsessive-compulsive personality disorder to also manifest OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder, a scrupulosity variant), it is rather uncommon. Actually, scrupulosity is a rather rare form of OCD. Research studies suggest that less than 19 percent of all patients with OCD meet criteria for the obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. Unfortunately, writers such as Leon Salzman and Richard Vaughan suggest that scrupulosity is one of the many manifestations of the obsessive-compulsive personality disorder and imply that somehow these two separate disorders are actually one disorder.

Probably, the basis of this confusion is rooted in Freud's famous case of the Rat Man. Remarkably, the Rat Man did manifest both OCD and obsessive-compulsive personality. Freud, as well as many of his disciples, prematurely concluded that there were two manifestations of one disorder. Today we know that effective treatment of OCD—and of scrupulosity—usually requires both medication and behavior therapy. As noted below, neither of these treatments is necessary for obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.

## PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

When it is adjudged that a minister's functioning is sufficiently hampered by his or her obsessive-compulsive personality, psychotherapy is probably the first and only intervention strategy that comes to mind. The basic goal of psychotherapy with this personality type is quite simple: the individual becomes able to balance the capacity to feel with the capacity to think, to live in the present at least as much as in the future or the past, and to develop the courage to be imperfect in order to balance perfectionistic strivings. Clinical lore suggests that long-term psychotherapy, lasting two to four years or more, is needed to modify this disorder. However, focused, briefer psychotherapeutic approaches offer a promising alternative. Since psychotherapy is never contextless, and because the obsessive-compulsive personality style is highly prized in certain religious organizations, psychotherapy may not, in and of itself, be the necessary and sufficient modality of change.

## ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

A few organizational interventions will be described briefly here. Perhaps the most important of these involves the screening of candidates.

**Screening.** Screening committees would do well to recognize the inherent bias that religious organizations have for the obsessive-compulsive personality. Weiser estimates that the majority of ministry personnel manifest a combination of obsessive-compulsive and narcissistic personality features. This combination is quite interesting in that seemingly opposite traits are balanced: while the narcissistic style is characterized by entitlement, grandiosity, and poor impulse control, the obsessive-compulsive style is characterized by perfectionism, fearfulness, and inability to act spontaneously.



Generally speaking, high-functioning candidates for ministry who combine both obsessive-compulsive and narcissistic features have considerable potential for a variety of ministries. Certainly, they are preferable to low-functioning candidates, and probably to higher-functioning candidates who are primarily obsessive-compulsive.

**Mentoring and Spiritual Direction.** Professional ministers (in practice or in training) who exhibit strong obsessive-compulsive features should be urged to work with mentors or spiritual directors who have balanced or mature personality styles. Just as psychotherapists with obsessive-compulsive personalities are not good matches for obsessive-compulsive clients, much can be gained by the minister whose obsessive-compulsive style is appreciated yet challenged by someone with another view of selfhood and life.

**Organizational Policies.** Since a given religious organization may be largely populated with ministry personnel with obsessive-compulsive styles, it is essential that diocesan and provincial councils consider how current policies, structures, and culture may unwittingly reinforce obsessive-compulsive pathology. For instance, when a congregation's culture is characterized by workaholicism, competitiveness, and premature deaths due to heart attacks and strokes, there may be considerable value in revising policies and procedures regarding such considerations as criteria for advanced study and career advancement, as well as the manner in which the group's charism is operationalized.

## CONCLUDING NOTE

It has been suggested that the obsessive-compulsive personality dynamic is common among ministry personnel and religious organizations. Many dioceses and congregations have been well served by high-functioning obsessive-compulsive ministers and retarded by those who are much lower-functioning. The challenge for screening committees and leadership councils is to review their personnel policies and their organizational culture, in light of their mission, as the basis for personnel decisions about screening, treatment, and possible changes in organizational structure and policies.

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# Impatience

*James Torrens, S.J.*

## Impatiens

impatiens, a ground cover  
bursting from its bed

red, white, pink, rose  
the flower that can't wait

loud in demands on water  
and huffy at slack attention

the flower for knuckle crackers  
and lane switchers

you hurry our steps along  
are not big on considerations

flower for the millennium  
impatience of the poor

The challenge plays itself out at home, in the school-room, in the office, and—maybe above all, these days—on the road.

Every so often I have to cross the border from Tijuana into California, the world's busiest border crossing. Lines of cars string out, waiting up to an hour to get through the checkpoints. And there are always the slick ones, coming up fast from outside and cutting in at the very end. A week or so before this writing, I was so determined to block out these small-time cheaters that I kept up as close as I could to the rear of the van in front of me, both of us proceeding stop-start. Of course, in a careless moment I bumped him, dented his fender, and ended up having to pay for its repair. So who's impatient? Even this pokey senior, who at normal moments is treated as a roadblock by the high-energy drivers and the hot-shots.

It's the little things that show you up. Tiny dramas occur in the nanosecond between when the traffic light turns green and the car behind you honks, but they also occur in the kitchen, at the ticket counter, at the receptionist's desk. Incidents of impatience on the road seldom turn up amid confessional matter, but plenty of people are humble about their shortcomings at home or work. What confessor hasn't heard from a distraught mother, "Father, I'm so im-

**I**f any issue of moral living recurs on a daily basis, it is the tension between patience and impatience.



patient with the children”? This can often enough be explained by the children—but often, too, at some bus station or airplane terminal, one has to feel a twinge for the active child whose parent is way beyond wit’s end.

There are lots of things, it needs to be said, that one should never be patient with—among them shoddy work, cheating, injustice to others. And we can often look on impatience as an energizer. Inventors have to be impatient with inefficiency. People in danger or in emergencies have to be impatient with whatever is blocking them. When David, in the Book of Samuel, is trying to escape from King Saul, he has to convince the priest of a sanctuary to let his hungry men eat consecrated bread (2 Samuel 21:1–7). According to Robert Alter, writing in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, David makes his case with the “impatience and driving insistence” proper to a dramatic crisis. In some circumstances, you can’t wait for life to come to you.

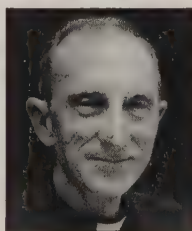
We have to admit that the famous patience of Job wore out in an early chapter of the book named after him. The rest of his lines, until the very end, are spent in self-justification to his accuser-friends and expostulation with God. Our human quotient of patience, in other words, turns out to be all too finite. Some years ago, when I was teaching in Mexico City, I would drive back to class in the afternoon with one of the resident Jesuits. The community members called him “el santo Padre Martin” because of his piety and amiability. To see “el santo” behind the wheel, however, was something else. I must confess that without his strong dose of assertiveness, we would still be out there in Mexico City traffic.

We can be thankful for impressive and chastening models of patience close to home: the patience of the fisherman, the patience of the research scientist, the patience of the expectant mother, many a teacher’s patience with slow learners. Allow me one example from here in Tijuana. Near our house, for hours every morning, a young newsboy straddles the double yellow line near the intersection with his armful of papers. Even as I hope he is not being deprived

of school, I am full of admiration at his controlled and long-enduring behavior. The patience of the poor, when one sees them waiting quietly in long lines or taking long treks on foot or by bus, shames the rest of us in our society of abundance. (How long, in a world of escalating abundance, they can put up with deprivation is a question that haunts any traveler to the Third World.)

In situations that call for alert and hopeful waiting, impatience would be not an energizer but a spoiler. Among other things, it spoils us for prayer. Here we are with our motors revving up for the day, or already running fast, and finding ourselves committed to, or tremendously in need of, some time with God. There are effective aids to structuring our prayer, such as the Ignatian preludes, and methods of calming and concentrating ourselves, as in centering prayer. There are measures of self-discipline or of relaxation that may be employed. But we will always need the reminder, in the dry or restless periods or just on the ordinary day, not to try forcing our prayer and not to abandon or despair of it.

After all, who do we need more patience with than ourselves? We get unmistakable cues to this effect from Jesus, in his parables about the farmer waiting and waiting for the full growth of his crops. And of course the patience of Jesus in his own hour of darkness has become our norm. The grace of Our Savior’s passion and death empowers countless people in their own pain, danger, mistreatment, mental illness, or loss of dear ones. With reason does the church applaud its Master: “Through your suffering you have brought forth a new patience” (Morning Prayer, Monday, Third Week).



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# Some Frequent Traps in Community Chapters

*Katherine Hanley, C.S.J., Ph.D.*

**C**ongregational chapters and other large assemblies, as most of us have experienced them, can be calls to conversion and renewal as well as sources of deep frustration. Our efforts at planning and facilitating such gatherings aim to provide a context in which participants can move to a place of conversion and commitment that will renew both individuals and congregations.

In the past several years I have been able to observe a number of chapters. Although each congregation has its unique charism, tone, and priorities, certain commonalities emerge. Among these commonalities are what I've come to think of as chapter traps or pitfalls—areas or situations or behaviors in which the community can get stuck. The thing about traps in, say, golf, is that once you fall into them, it is difficult to get out without special effort. It is possible, but only if you realize that you are in a trap. This article describes a few traps I've observed; there may be others. Each community seems to have one or two favorites.

## THE WRITING TRAP

This trap is the temptation to believe that by writing something—a mission statement, a chapter

enactment, a proclamation—we bring it into being. It's a very understandable trap, because most of us invest significant energy in writing our documents and other materials. The depth of this trap is directly proportional to the amount of time we give to producing the piece. What group has not looked with pride and gratitude on a piece of writing, only to realize two or three years later that relatively little activity followed the publication of the document? In order to avoid the writing trap, the group affirming the piece must ask, very deliberately and specifically, "What are we going to do now that we have this document?"

## THE HOLINESS OF DIVERSITY TRAP

This trap is common to congregations such as my own, whose members engage in a wide variety of ministries. In affirming and celebrating this diversity it is easy to lose sight of the reality that widespread diversity makes concentrated focus difficult, if not impossible. It is in fact possible to make diversity an end in itself, so that anything one does or thinks is wonderful if it has never been done or thought before. Overemphasizing diversity raises several questions: What about corporate witness? How can or will we speak with one voice in those areas



where a strong voice is needed? Is there a “we” here or are we a collection of Lone Rangers? I was once at a gathering where a participant remarked, “We are unified by our diversity.” This trap is extraordinarily difficult to address, because looking for focus or corporate witness may be seen as somehow interfering with freedom, preferences, or ability to listen to God’s voice.

## THE SPIRITUALITY TRAP

This trap is subtle and difficult. When we’re here, we avoid looking at difficult questions by invoking “holy” language. This trap uses all our favorite words: Are we trusting the Spirit of God as we should? Is this a test of our faith? If we all prayed harder, wouldn’t these difficulties go away? Obviously, every one of these questions is legitimate. If we are about anything at all, it is the desire to make God central in our lives. If we believe in God’s presence among us, surely we want to commit to loving waiting on that presence. Overspiritualizing, however, can lead to compartmentalization of our lives and a sort of naive “God will provide” stance that ignores the work involved.

## THE OVERINTELLECTUALIZING TRAP

This is a pretty complex trap, often characteristic of well-educated groups. It can take several forms; one is searching for more data. There will always be more data and new ways of refining it. There will always be novel ways of nuancing and massaging data. If we work at the data long enough, the problems we are studying may go away—or they may not.

In the absence of data, endless speculation on causes or reasons can preoccupy groups for significant amounts of time. As a vocation director, I’ve heard many conversations about why more women aren’t entering religious communities. These tend to be anecdotal (“My niece told me. . .”), vague (“Families are deteriorating”), or judgmental (“Young people are selfish”). In fact, there is a significant body of research on this topic, but it is easier to chat about the issue than to read the material.

A third way of overintellectualizing is to get an outside speaker. A speaker can provide a wonderful service by articulating questions, clarifying issues, and offering options for action. It is possible, however, to have a speaker primarily in order to feel that we have accomplished something. Just as the writing trap needs to lead into doing, the speaker trap needs to lead into reacting or responding.

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**Congregational chapters and other large assemblies, as most of us have experienced them, can be calls to conversion and renewal as well as sources of deep frustration**

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## THE DENIAL TRAP

It may be that the other traps I’ve listed are really variations of the denial trap—the most complicated of all. Readings in spiritual direction suggest that denial (along with its cousin, resistance) is deeply rooted in the human psyche, particularly in persons of faith. What does denial look like in congregational chapters?

We can deny (i.e., fail to recognize) the facts themselves. Some years ago, it was my responsibility to gather congregational data from our seven provinces and vice provinces. In one calendar year, we had no novices in any of our United States units. When I would mention this piece of information to various groups around the congregation, people would often try to correct me, saying “You don’t have all the facts” or “There are novices out West (or back East or up North).” The reality was simply not one that most people wanted to deal with. Denial was easier.

We can deny the implications of the facts. In the above example, other common responses were “But there are novices in Peru” or “But look at all our associate members.” These statements were true, but they neatly diverted attention from the reality we did not want to address.

We can deny our relationship to the facts. It’s all too easy to say “I’ll be retired or not here, so why should I be concerned?” We can say “Not on my watch” or “Not in my region.” The hard questions are something “they” have to address; “we” or “I” will just do our ministry.



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**Despite all the possibilities for getting stuck or bogged down, religious communities continue to move forward with great good will, prayerfulness, and zeal for God's people**

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Ultimately, we can deny the very issues we are trying to address. In this case we get those famous elephants in our living rooms. Everyone knows they are there but continues to act as though they do not exist.

### THE DERAILING DYNAMIC

Another chapter dynamic I've noted is a different way of getting stalled or stuck: making comments that can detour or derail an entire discussion. I've come to think of them as gremlins—little critters that wait outside the doors of the chapter room, waiting for a chance to come in. Once in, they can engage the membership. They do not usually appear until well into the chapter. Here are three common ones:

**"Isn't That Already in Our Documents?"** This innocent question can lead a group to abandon whatever it was about to say. Probably the idea *is* contained in the congregational documents; otherwise, why would it be engaging the membership? But it may need to be restated so that the members can recommit.

**"Do You Have Any Idea What All This Will Cost?"** Again, this is a perfectly valid question. If it is raised prematurely, however, it can paralyze the membership and prevent them from the dreaming and visioning to which our chapters call us. Once we have the vision, we need to put our reality glasses back on and do what we can.

**"My Favorite Word Isn't in Here Yet."** This comment is rarely made out loud, but many members have a word or a theme or a cause, and they aren't peaceful until it is included. This temptation can lead us to "say everything" any time we write anything. It probably makes our documents longer than they need to be, and it certainly calls us to spend unnecessary hours on wordsmithing and rewriting.

### AVOIDING PITFALLS

What can we do about all these traps and temptations? We can look at our behaviors and call our attention to those occasions when we may be in danger of falling or settling into a trap. As noted earlier, communities have their favorite traps and may avoid others traps altogether. They may also discover new traps. When a group senses that it may be stuck, it can be helpful to take a look to see whether any of these behaviors are operating.

Despite all these possibilities for getting stuck or bogged down, religious communities continue to move forward with great good will, prayerfulness, and zeal for God's people. The Spirit of God is a creative Spirit. As we learn through our chapter experiences and our relationships with one another, we are more able to bring our best energies to that future to which God is leading us. I'm reminded of the maps we get from travel agencies or computers when we are preparing for a long drive. It is always helpful when the maps note "rough road ahead" or "detour here." Forewarned, we drive more responsibly.



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# Finding God in the City

*Reverend Joseph Diele, D.Min.*

**I** have been a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, for the past fifteen years. I have studied much, read much, and experienced much in the way of ministry. As the years have gone by, I have developed my own style and form of ministry. When I tried to describe them on paper, I began to realize that the principles I live by in my ministry are the principles of contemplative living:

1. *Nothing will change, nor will anyone change, except me, if I submit to the process of living.*
2. *In everything, learn to live always without expectations.*
3. *Hold onto nothing. What I hold onto too tightly will eventually be pried out of my fingers.*
4. *The goal of ministry is fidelity, not success.*
5. *In all things and at all times, do the best I can do.*
6. *Simply walk with God's people. Be a living presence of God.*
7. *In all situations and at all times, love—no matter what happens, no matter what the cost.*

It seems to me, more than ever, that we priests need to minister from a contemplative heart. We live in a church that continues to grow and develop. Each year, we discover more needs and more people to serve. At the same time, there are fewer priests to serve all the people that come our way and all the needs they share with us. Yes, there is a shortage of

priests, but there is surely not a shortage of men and women who want to minister and who do minister in the church. We priests wind up becoming the ministers to the ministers, and so it becomes very clear that we need to minister from the deepest places in our own hearts. Over and again, we are also called upon to model, for the other ministers in the church, what it means to be a minister. We can no longer simply go about our work as if we are employees of some multinational corporation; we do what we do because we are ambassadors of Christ. The challenge is for us to be converted, so as to be signs to our people and our ministers of the great love God has offered us in Jesus, the Christ.

The call to ministry is how the church bears witness to the Good News of Jesus. Ministry is how we in the church act in the world. It is a way to love and care for the world that God has entrusted to us. Our ministry is a call to service and is at the very heart of what it means to be the church. Ministry is the way the church puts flesh on the proclamation given to us in the person of Jesus. As ministers of the church, we are proclaimers of this Word who is life. Our work of proclamation is a work of incarnating God's word in our world. Our ministry takes place in a specific place and at a specific time in history. We are planted among God's people as bearers of Good News. Given



were thirty-five people in the church on my first Sunday. As time passed and people began to realize that the church was not closing, many people started returning to our church—a wonderful experience for me. In those days, I actually thought I was accomplishing something.

The people wanted to have a midnight mass again. I supported the idea, and we had about fifty people at midnight mass. I expected a big crowd on Christmas Day—but besides my guitarist and my piano player, only two more people showed up.

My people do not really have what I would call a Catholic culture. Most grew up in the Protestant church, and when some of them wandered from the parish when there was talk of closing it, they went not to other Catholic parishes but to Protestant churches. In many such churches, including Baptist, Pentecostal, and nondenominational Christian churches, Christmas is not observed as a special church feast day. So it is very hard to get my people to come together to celebrate Christmas. This was the first of many lessons I had to learn—and they have been hard, painful, and even sometimes very expensive.

I remember, during my first few years at the parish, getting a Catholic revivalist to perform mass for a few days. These days would always be very expensive, and I never had more than eleven people come to the church for any of them—my two musicians, myself, and eight people who were interested in a parish revival. I had to learn to listen more closely to my people and to realize that if they did not ask for it, they would not come. My expectations had to go if I were going to live with any peace in my heart. If I expect that things will change or that more people will respond to a program or a project, or if I expect that my people will think what I think, I will continue to be disappointed. When I expect nothing, anything that happens or anyone who shows up or anyone who can follow through on what they said they would do is a reason for me to thank God. When I hold onto expectations, all that happens is that I become sad, bitter, and unhappy and feel like a failure.

## **HOLD ONTO NOTHING**

Another principle of the spiritual life is to learn to live without attachments, or to at least attempt to learn how to hold onto nothing. Over the years, I have had my room robbed, my car vandalized almost monthly, and even a new doorbell for my office stolen. I have had windows shot through with stray bullets. If I should even have a second thought about any of these things, I might become disheartened or unhappy. Through experience, I have learned what is really important and what is not—and that what is

not important does not need to be clung to. I have learned that clinging brings pain. The spiritual practice of letting go is not only about material things; it has to do with the whole of ministry in the inner city. The longer you are in a parish, the more you know about your people. It can be a wonderful thing to watch your people over a long period of time, or it can be painful. I think of some of the kids who came to us as great little children and then got into painful or abusive relationships. Some of those kids, of course, have had kids, and others have joined gangs and carry guns. If I were to hold onto the fact that I and my staff did so much for them or that they should know better, I would be a very sad and disappointed person. The reality of life—any life—is that we cannot hold onto it or control it. The other side of this coin is something I have instilled in my staff: when these young ones come around, we do not stand in judgment; with the same enthusiasm and excitement as the first time we received them, we embrace them, accept them, and walk with them. It is essential to hold onto nothing if we are going to be servants of God and God's people.

## **FIDELITY, NOT SUCCESS**

One of the most difficult lessons of ministry is coming to realize that the goal of ministry is not success. Of course, the lesson that success is not the goal of any ministry is one we can all learn, no matter where we may minister. Ministry in the inner city puts the question of success or results right in your face. Mother Teresa was said to have told an inquisitive reporter that God did not ask that she be successful but rather that she be faithful. I can say that each day I learn a little bit more about what it means to be faithful and successful.

Like most people, I have had to struggle with the question of success as I have attempted to minister to the people of my parish for the past nine years. I can look around and think that nothing will change, but surely somehow, someday, the people of my parish will really respond. Maybe the church will be full. Maybe those who come will follow through on what they promised to do. Maybe if I really work hard, we will have more people. Sometimes I am at a clergy gathering, and other pastors will talk about the five hundred children they had for First Communion last year. I talk about the two who received First Communion in my parish. I walk away wondering, What do they think I do? Do they think that work in the inner city is nothing because we don't raise the same kind of money or have the same numbers?

In the end, I think there is no success anywhere. We are all ministers of the gospel, and we have been



asked just to plant seeds. My goal, therefore, is not to succeed but to be faithful. Some other ministries can give the appearance and feed the illusion that we are actually successful. I have come to realize a different truth: that the only real success story is that I am being true to the call given me. So often, I will put hours into helping someone become free of an abusive partner, and in the end they go back to that partner and become even more trapped in a physically abusive situation. I have helped kids recognize their potential, and in the end they get pregnant or father a child out of wedlock. I have gone out of my way to put someone through school, begging for tuition money, and after graduation I get not so much as a thank you and never see that child again.

I remember a young woman whose husband died of AIDS. She too was infected with the disease. She was sad, and the mourning process was rough. She came to talk to me. We started meeting weekly. She got involved in the church and began to participate in the sacramental life of the church, after having been away for a long time. After months of weekly meetings, she was ready to let go of her husband's ashes. She brought his ashes to the church and they stayed in the urn, among the plants around our baptismal pool, until she was ready to let go of them.

Finally, the day arrived for her to surrender the ashes. I had an undertaker help us. The woman wanted her husband's ashes poured into the East River. We went at 3:00 p.m., on a rainy Monday afternoon, to a park under the Brooklyn Bridge. When we arrived, we discovered that the shooting of a movie was taking place, and we could not pour the ashes into the river in the middle of their set. We had to go to another park nearby, which was about to close. The woman, her girlfriend, and I went into the park; the undertaker had to climb over a fence in order to be nearer to the water. We prayed; the woman was crying, her friend was consoling her, and a Parks Department officer was calling to us that the park was closing. As we returned to the church, the woman was both happy and at peace.

She continued to come to church for the next month. She was then missing for a couple of weeks, and I wondered if she was sick. Before calling her, I happened to see her on the street. She ran up to me with great excitement, obviously well and very happy. I wanted to ask if she was feeling well but did not get the chance. "I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed. "I have to tell you, I found a church, a nondenominational church. It's a great church—the music is great, and it's just wonderful." I was not sure how to respond. Ultimately, I congratulated her and told her that if she needed us, she knew where we were.

It is not that we have bad music; our gospel choir is one of the best in the diocese. It is not that our people don't welcome you or make you feel at home. In the end, I am not sure what she was really saying. This would be a typical "success story" as I pastor my church. In other words, whatever the role of the pastor is, it is not to be successful. I have this awareness that whatever we do not let go of freely will be pried from our fingers. We cannot hold onto anything or refuse to let go if we are going to learn that God is God and we are not.

## DO YOUR BEST

I remember my first pastor in an inner-city church in the Ocean Hill Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Father John Powis had been in the parish of Our Lady of Presentation for twenty-six years at the point of my arrival. John had a line he always used when we just could not get things done or get them done in a great way: "We do the best we can." At first, that line would infuriate me. Then I grew some, and I knew that after whatever was our latest disaster, he was going to say it, and I had come to smile at it and even sometimes laugh about it. Often, I find that it is the only sensible thing to say in the midst of circumstances over which we have no control. That line is essential if one is attempting to live the contemplative life. We eventually learn that God is God and we are not. We come to realize that God is in control, and it is supposed to be that way. We learn that with a trusting heart, it is nice to know that God is there and in control of it all. I am reminded of the line from John's gospel: "Fear not, I have overcome the world."

We need not walk about afraid; God is here, and the best thing I can do, believe, and say on this spiritual path is, "I do the best I can." When I am doing the best I can, I am being most faithful to the call I have been given. This phrase also implies that I know who I am. Echoed through the years from the desert mothers and fathers, the great spiritual masters of our tradition, is the most important spiritual question any one of us can answer: "Who am I?" It seems to me that we can only own doing the best we can when we know who we are and what we are capable of, and recognize Whose we are.

To live without control is such an odd concept in our success-driven culture. We are taught from a very young age that we are to be masters of our own destiny. I think the complete opposite is what we grow into as we discover God. Who I am can never be the sum total of all of my accomplishments, my degrees, my success stories; rather, it is who I am in my gut, in my personhood.



We had a horrible experience of two highly trusted individuals totally taking advantage of our church. One person ran our food pantry and, as might be expected, she would take some food for herself—sometimes the best. What developed into a real problem was her selling the food for drug money. Her husband, also a trusted person around the church, was hiding drugs in our parish van. What can I say but that we do the best we can. My job is surely to correct the abuses, and also to love those who have abused our trust. I find myself, in situation after situation, story after story, saying we just do the best we can.

## WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

A contemplative approach to ministry means learning to walk along with one's people. I often describe to a new person with whom I will do spiritual direction what my style of direction is all about. I describe spiritual direction and all ministry in terms of the Emmaus story, as presented in Luke 24. I find myself walking with another on life's journey, and if we pay attention, we may discover another partner with us—and this partner, who may be a stranger to us, is God. For a contemplative ministering to God's people, it is essential to learn to walk with and be a presence to God's people, because God is already present in every situation of our existence. If we start with the premise that God is, then God is a presence. It is God's presence that we live in, move in, and have our being in. The most important thing we can do for another is to be with them. Most of the time we have no right words to offer; surely, there is no great advice that one can give, and of course we cannot solve anyone's problem or take away anyone's pain. The best we can offer, the best we can do, is simply to be with the other on the road of life—and together we may discover that God is in our midst.

Ministering in a contemplative way does not come to one suddenly, like a bolt of lightning. Nor can one learn to be a contemplative from a book. Surely, our whole culture tells us that we have to produce, we have to achieve, we have to accomplish, so it is very hard for us to be open to God's Spirit at work in our world. In 1982 I had a transformative experience in my own formation as a minister. I was a seminarian, taking two units of clinical pastoral education at Kingsborough Psychiatric Hospital. The supervisor brought me to the locked ward that would be my unit for the first two months of the program. I had visited patients in a general hospital, but until this point I had never even visited a psychiatric hospital, let alone ministered in a mental ward. I had all the fears one

usually has upon starting something new and going into a different environment.

The supervisor held a large skeleton key, with which he opened the very large metal door with a tiny mesh window. He said that I should introduce myself to the staff, who did not wear uniforms, so that I would be able to get out in two hours. I remember the sound of the heavy door closing and the lock clicking shut, with me on the inside and the supervisor on the outside.

I tried to find a nurse to say who I was and what I was doing and that in two hours I would want to leave. I then proceeded into a corridor with a couple of rooms to my right. There were people all along the hallway wall. Some were staring; others were talking to themselves; still others laughed to themselves. I was not sure what to do or whom to talk to. I was scared, yet I had a mission: I was the chaplain for this unit.

I remember standing in that corridor feeling helpless. I finally forced myself to go over to the wall and speak to a man who had his head down but was not laughing or talking to himself. I approached him, said, "Hi," and had some eye contact. So far, not bad. I told him that I was from the Pastoral Care Department and that I was the chaplain visiting that day. He continued to look at me, or maybe it was through me. He said nothing, just looked, and whatever he was seeking, I was not any kind of obstacle for him. He continued looking as I slunk away, feeling stupid.

I then approached another resident. Again, there was some eye contact, but I am not sure whether it was a result of my saying "Hi" or simply because he was looking down and I was shorter than he. There was a long silence that seemed to last hours, although it probably was just a few seconds—and then he started laughing and laughing and laughing. I smiled and slunk away. This was turning out to be a real disaster, at least in my mind. All I kept thinking was, What will I share with the group on my return?

I finally made my way through the corridor with the hope that the room at the end would be better for me. I walked into a very large day room and there were people—maybe thirty or more—walking in a large circle. These residents were just walking and walking. I looked over to a corner, and there was a patient masturbating and a staff member scolding. I looked in a different direction, and there was a patient crying. Another patient looked out the barred window, yelling to those passing by. I felt defeated. How could I do something? What could I do? How could I be successful? How could I tell these people I was the chaplain? I thought further and deeper and realized that everyone was in their own world, and I could not penetrate it. I really thought I had



something to give, to share with these people, but no one seemed to care.

Then I had one of the greatest insights of my life. I realized that I did not have to give them anything. I did not have to succeed; I simply had to be with these people. At that moment, I lost my inhibitions. I stopped worrying about what the staff would say or what the group would say, and I joined the circle. I started walking with the people. I had to keep up with their fast pace, and I simply said, "Hi, I'm Joe."

The patient walking next to me said "I'm Ron." We began to talk to each other about the day, the weather, how long he was here, that I was just visiting to say hi and be with the people on the unit. I then moved to another person in the circle and then another, and before I knew it, the two hours were up, and I had discovered the meaning of the Incarnation. I had discovered that the most important ministry is to be present.

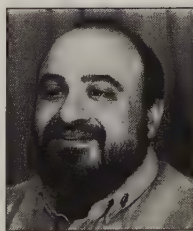
When we realize that we can simply walk with our people, that we don't have to fix them or change them or do anything, we discover that we can really enter into deep places in their hearts simply by being willing to walk with them in their life story. My experience of inner-city ministry is just the same as when I worked in the psychiatric hospital: I am called to simply walk with my people. I don't have to change them, but I need to be really present to them.

Ministry, for me, has become a way to walk with my people in the same way the disciples walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. If we are open, if we are daring enough to walk with another, we may discover that there is a stranger in our midst, and it is God. As we walk with our people, we hold them, their story, and their pain in our own hearts. We are willing to go where they lead us, and in so doing we "cry the gospel with our lives." Each time we enter the world of another, we walk with another, and we have the opportunity to meet God. I think one of the best vehicles of evangelization is to be present to others, to enter into their world—to be with them not out of some kind of neurotic guilt or some desire to save them, but because that is where they are. We then give witness to the great love of God. In my experience as an inner-city priest and a contemplative, I am urged by my call to learn, over and over again, how to be with my people, no matter what happens in their lives.

## CREATED FOR LOVE

The goal of the Christian life is simply to love. Love is the only reason for ministry—all ministry. The call to love is the call to be human. I would also say, along with the ancient Fathers of the Church, that when we are most human, when we embody love, then are we most divine. We were made for no other reason except to love. We were made by Love to be love in our world. The heart of the contemplative minister is fashioned to love, no matter what. I often say to my staff that our only reason for ministering is simply to love.

Our people may come bearing a painful story. Sometimes they may be the victims of terrible abuse and violence. Our job, as ministers, is simply to walk with them and love them through the pain. Our love can be actualized by our willingness to stand at their cross with them and, when possible, to help them with their cross. If our love is offered without condition (you will change your life, you will attend church regularly, you will see the world or God as I do), then and only then are we loving as God loves. The call to be a contemplative minister means that there is a daringness in the minister—a willingness to simply, without counting the cost, be with our people. This call to love, no matter what, is the hardest of all the steps of living as a contemplative minister. In the end, I think, it is by our love that we will be known. I also think that it is by our willingness to love that we are contemplative or not. Love makes our words flesh. Love is the fruit of all contemplation. Love is, in the end, what the Incarnation is all about. God is with us; God is gracing us and always calling us ever deeper into divine love, so that we might give the gift that we have received as a gift: the love of God.



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# A Dialogue Among Professionals

*Allan Schnarr, Ph.D.*

**S**piritual direction and psychotherapy have a great deal in common. They fit together on an overlapping continuum, with more similarities than differences. This was the recurrent discovery of the staff at Claret Center in Chicago, Illinois, as we discussed how we understand what we do. At successive staff meetings, each staff member presented his or her own understanding of his or her work as a spiritual director or psychotherapist. The degree of correspondence between us is probably not surprising, given that we are a gathering of psychologically informed spiritual directors and spiritually responsive psychotherapists. We have long been engaged in the challenge of wholesome relationship between our disciplines. We strive to communicate in a way that is faithfully attentive to the experiential truth on both sides. What follows is a summary of our interaction. It is an attempt to represent who we are and does not necessarily represent our respective disciplines as a whole.

## CONCEPTS COMMONLY HELD

Here are some of the central concepts on which we all agreed:

- Truth and relationship are at the heart of our work.
- Life experience is the teacher/healer. Those who

come to see us have a deep personal engagement with their lives.

- Sources of inner knowing—images/feelings/stories—are of the essence. Thematic patterns orient the journey.
- Nonjudgmental listening and acceptance: this is our stance with those who journey with us and how we encourage them to be with themselves.
- Shifts happen as a surprise (beyond our control): usually, we do not make things happen. We believe that uncertainty is opportunity.
- Deemphasize self of director/therapist: we are part of something greater. We participate in the movement of Spirit in our own ways.
- Lifelong developmental journey: the core dynamic in which we participate is letting the old die to have new life (Paschal Mystery).

## DIFFERENCES WITHIN COMMON GROUND

Here are some of the themes on which our differences were evident, although still within the overlapping continuum of our similarities.

**Focus.** All those who meet with us actively engage in the intentional articulation of their own personal experience. They come to talk about what has



happened or is happening in their lives, and for the most part they use everyday words to do so. Our differences here have to do with the focus and sometimes the language of our conversations. In spiritual direction, the focus, in one way or another, is relationship with God, and spiritual language is often used. In psychotherapy, the focus is more problem-centered, with attention paid to emotional and relational difficulties and self-defeating behavior patterns. It is generally our experience that spiritual direction is most helpful to people whose inner self is easily accessible and articulated. Therapy clients often struggle with more significant blocks to awareness and articulation of themselves.

**Process.** All those who meet with us deepen their understanding of themselves within their relationships. In spiritual direction, the director places prime value on being an accepting presence to facilitate the directee's growth in understanding. The psychotherapist places prime value on communicating his or her understanding of the client's experience, thereby also facilitating growth in understanding. Our spiritual directors lean more toward being, our therapists more toward doing. Both of these, however, are only leanings within an overall balance of the two. Psychotherapy tends to be more goal-oriented, spiritual direction more about being present to what is. On the other hand, therapy makes movement toward goals by encouraging full awareness of the present moment. Spiritual directors consciously work at leaving room for God to be active. Psychotherapists strive to make a difference themselves through their interventions with their clients. All of us see our work as a form of ministry in which we cooperate with the movement of Spirit.

**Theory.** Both disciplines rely on their theoretical framework to orient their activity. Therapists use various psychological theories to inform their understanding of the client's dilemmas and needs,

and to guide their responses to the client. Spiritual directors have a belief system regarding the dynamics of relationship with God. Their beliefs guide their understanding of, and ways of being with, directees. For therapists, their relationship with the client is an important source of information and experience. Spiritual directors tend to downplay the relationship and stay more focused on the directee's inner movements of spirit. Both disciplines provide compassionate attention to pain. In spiritual direction, pain is accepted as part of the Paschal Mystery—something to live with, a vehicle for relationship with God and others. Psychotherapists are intentional about relieving pain, though paradoxically this happens through the direct experience of pain. One of the goals of therapy is to bring hidden pain into consciousness.

Generalizations rarely represent the rich texture that emerges from the actual experience of the details. This is true regarding our attempts to describe our work with our clients, and regarding my attempt to describe how members of our staff learn from each other. What's missing is the careful passion each of us has for what we do. Our wholehearted devotion to those who come to walk with us is what we felt and were fed by as we talked. The opportunity to participate in the mystery of an individual's journey into the fullness of life is what we cherish. The spirit that rose in our midst as we talked was the best fruit of our interchange. We were inspired to carry on, hopeful of becoming a little wiser along the way.



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# Religious Life in Africa

*John Kapenda, O.F.M., Conv.*

**R**eligious life has stayed in Africa for well over a century. For more than a hundred years, it has sunk its roots into the continent and found a home in the African village. This can be referred to as the inculturation of religious life. The information we have at our disposal helps us to prove this phenomenon. For example, the working document in preparation for the special assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, indicates that by 1989, 41,645 of the 885,645 women religious in the church were Africans. Martin O'Reilly, in his book *"The Challenge of Being a Religious in Africa Today,"* reports that in 1990, of the 11,000 native priests working in Africa, 2,000 were members of religious orders. Our source does not give us information about brother religious; there could be many more. We are also aware that over a hundred native religious communities of both men and women have sprung up. All these indications prove that the church in Africa is mature enough to participate actively in building up the Body of Christ.

Some missionaries who came to Africa had one thing in mind: to proclaim the gospel and to win the Africans to Christianity. In their zeal to do this, they paid little attention to the cultures and traditions of the African people. We could say that they came to Africa with ready-made questions and answers. The

Christianity they brought was one developed in Europe over the centuries, in response to and conditioned by the specific situations and people of Europe. They expected the native Africans to embrace that Christianity without any difficulties, as though it were developed within the background of their situations, cultures, and traditions. In some instances, the missionaries not only ignored the cultures and traditions of the African people but also condemned them as primitive, pagan, and even satanic.

The approach that some of these early missionaries took in their presentation of the gospel message, and the attitude they displayed toward African cultures and traditions, rendered Christianity and religious life foreign to many African people. Some new African members in Christian faith, and also in religious life, considered themselves as belonging to international communities but saw no relationship with their own brothers and sisters who were not Christians or religious. As a result, Christianity and religious life never helped some of them to discover the values, hidden in their own cultures and traditions, that could have enhanced their Christian and religious life.

The African men and women who embraced religious life, for example, were made to believe that their modes of thinking and acting should be similar



to their brothers and sisters abroad. They were expected to live by the same rules of life as religious in Europe or America, pray in a similar manner, and organize their social and spiritual lives the way their brothers and sisters did abroad. Even their way of dressing and manner of eating were to be the same. Above all, their formation structure was to follow the pattern of those in Europe. Like the rest of the Christians, the African religious were never helped to explore the cultural values that would have made them truly religious and at the same time truly Africans. Fortunately, this approach to formation is gradually dying out, and many religious communities are actually integrating their formation programs with the African culture.

It is important that African religious be once again exposed to the positive values of their cultures and traditions. They should be helped to discover in themselves the values of formation that will enable them to understand their religious life within their own context and worldview, and to live it as Africans. I believe that the kind of religious life needed by an African is that which puts him or her above superficialities. An ideal religious is one who is in tune with the culture and traditions of his or her people. He or she should know the customs of his or her people and live them in daily life. And these customs should be well lived, according to the current way of life of the people. Such is the person who is guided by wisdom in all he or she says and does. A good religious is also the one who knows how to live with the people. Such a person does not study people but draws near them and communicates with them. His or her way of life is honest, sincere, humble, and accepted by the local community.

Religious life is understood as a family or community of members witnessing Jesus to others. In our African tradition, individual members were expected to live in accordance with the customs and traditions of the people, actively participate in community activities, act in solidarity with others, and preserve the harmony and peace that prevailed in the community. Whoever did not comply with these requirements ran the risk of being sanctioned by the community, isolated, or even exiled from the community, depending on the gravity of the matter.

But before the community reaches the point of sanctioning a member, all the necessary corrections, advice, and reconciliatory moves are offered. If the individual stubbornly refuses to reform, then the community has no option but to be tough with him or her. The unity among the members of the community is fostered through such activities as plowing, harvesting, and feasting. Community unity is also expressed through common concern for one another

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## Religious life in Africa has been understood and lived in such diverse ways that it is difficult to give one description of it

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and mutual assistance during times of need. If some of these positive virtues of community life can be applied today, religious life in Africa can be different.

The truth of the matter is that religious life in Africa has been understood and lived in such diverse ways that it is difficult to give one description of it. The Fathers of Vatican Council II acknowledge this difficulty when they say, "Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church authority has been at pains to give a right interpretation of the counsels, to regulate this practice, and also to set up stable forms of living them." We understand that the Council Fathers are referring to the three evangelical counsels the religious take as they make their first profession. But the fact remains that any difficulty experienced in explaining the counsels affects also the explanation of religious life itself, given that it is in religious life that these counsels are lived. In view of this difficulty, I have chosen to reflect on the meaning of religious life in this article.

The profession of the religious through the three vows came much later in the history of religious life. The holy virgins of the early church and the desert hermits of the third and fourth centuries did not take the vows, though they professed religious life. The three vows became part of religious profession only in the fifth century, when Basil in the East and Benedict in the West decided to restructure religious life according to a well-codified rule of life. Even so, the vows did not become the essence of religious life, as they were to become during the post-Tridentine period.

The monks or the nuns undertook the vows not as part of their ascetic practices but for the purpose of community living. Celibacy, for example, was taken as the appropriate lifestyle of community living. Poverty was understood as the involvement of the

new members in the care, sharing, and the use of the monastery's material goods for the sake of the monastic family. When vows came to be central in the life of religious, it was in an effort to brighten the vision of the religious toward the real goal of their life. Each vow came to the core at a time when it was needed most. Poverty, for example, became the central vow at the time when the spiritual life of both the clergy and the laity was crippled by excessive wealth. The monasteries were not spared either. In fact, the wealth of the monasteries had become a source of scandal.

We have still to establish whether or not religious life in Africa is the expression of a deep inner awareness. Evidence indicates that religious life came to the continent as part of a wider Christian missionary activity. The different religious missionary congregations that came to Africa defined themselves by the kind of apostolates they carried out, and that influenced the way they lived their religious life among the people. Their practices were copied by the native religious congregations that sprang up on the continent.

These facts force us to ask, What really was religious life for the Africans who joined it shortly after the faith was introduced on the continent? Was it a religious life that they were embracing, or was it the style of life of the missionaries who brought faith to the continent? What is religious life for an African today? The impression one gets from the answers to these questions is that many religious in Africa see themselves primarily called to serve their brothers and sisters—a notion that developed out of the ways the different religious congregations in Africa have defined themselves. We might also ask, Is religious life identical with the service a religious community renders to the local community? Is the apostolic life the core of religious life in Africa today?

The aim of this article is to show that African religious life is more than what religious do within the church, and much higher than the service they render to their brothers and sisters. The other aim is to stress the importance of the religious vows in Africa today and how compatible they are with our African customs and traditions. Before we go any further, we should ask ourselves, What is the meaning of religious life?

## **PRESERVE AFRICAN TRADITION**

Many people today, especially non-Africans, believe that it is not necessary for us Africans to go back to the roots of our culture, because they see it as primitive, barbaric, and pagan. But our culture is

part of us, and it is impossible to initiate an individual into religious life without knowing and understanding his or her culture. This is what the church has been teaching since the Second Vatican Council.

However, to enable us to retrieve our culture, which has been so much buried by the "culture" of foreign religious life and contains very rich values, we have to go back to the roots of our own African tradition and obtain what is valuable and important to our religious life, especially in Africa today. The reason for going back to our roots is that to most Africans, religious life seems artificial and does not hold any meaning for them at all. Our witnessing to the people, in my opinion, is more European-oriented than African-oriented. Hence, the challenges that we religious give to the African people of today do not have much impact on their lives. I believe that the only way to interpret our religious life is in a more African way. But before we do that, we Africans have to know and understand the culture that has been passed on to us by our ancestors.

The culture of any given person plays a major role in that person's faith and religious life; we all have different images of God, depending to our cultural backgrounds. Culture is a very complex human phenomenon; it is almost impossible to distill it into a simple, comprehensive definition. We all must bear in mind that culture embraces the full range of behavior in a group: not only its literature, music, language, and dance, but also the structure of its society, its rituals, and many other elements.

If I do not interpret my religious life, then I will simply be pretending; my religious life will not give any meaning to the local people. No one's cultural expression of religious life is the complete expression, nor can it be normative for others—that is, a standard against which all others are measured. Sometimes we African religious have the tendency to follow non-African cultures, and shun our own, hence losing our self-identity.

## **FEATURES OF AFRICAN CULTURE**

Every individual is very important in our culture; he or she ought to be respected as somebody distinct from others. In religious life also, the most important element is to respect each individual as a human being, no matter what culture that person is from.

The concept of community in Africa is deeply rooted in our socioeconomic and socioreligious life. For example, once a child is born, he or she belongs not only to the parents but also to the entire community. It is the responsibility of the whole extended family to help the child grow and feel a sense of belonging. The African proverb "One finger does not



pick out a louse” illustrates this belief that an individual cannot work alone and needs the whole family and community.

Family, in Africa, means extended family. In community villages and towns, people know each other, and thus communication is easy. They share easily about their life, whether in times of sickness, death, or marriage. Each person has to participate actively as a member of the community. If a person does not involve himself or herself in the community, he or she is regarded as a “wizard,” and nobody will help that person when he or she is in difficulties.

It is unthinkable in Africa, for example, to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole community or village. In my language we have a saying that literally means, “Only clothes cannot be enough, but food is always enough.” One may have very little food, but one has to share with the community, because food is always enough for everybody. When it comes to Christian religious life, that is where you find a big contradiction. No person is allowed to share a meal with us unless that person is invited. Privacy is very much stressed in our rules. For an African, the society where you go to live becomes your family. Some Africans sometimes challenge people from other cultures to be more open to relationships of different kinds, and to the wider community. Most of our values related to community life are based in mutuality and interdependence.

Our people would like to see a community of religious living a concrete community life by being responsible and open to themselves and others. Community life is not something new to them. The members must actively contribute their talents and gifts to the community. They should be given a chance to make mistakes and to learn and accept their limitations, while at the same time being appreciated for who they are in the community. This will then help them gradually to develop that sense of belonging.

We Africans are known to be hospitable people because we highly value hospitality. When people visit us, they must be treated as guests and special people. Once a visitor comes to our place, he or she must be given special attention and must be the priority of the house. In our religious life, there are only specific times when visitors are supposed to come and visit us. Not only that, food is not even given to them if they have not made an appointment before visiting our religious communities. According to our African culture, a person who closes the door while eating is considered to be the most evil person in the community.

In Africa, initiation ceremonies are sometimes performed with both boys and girls, except in very few

tribes. Some young people do not go for their initiation rites; usually, elders give such young people some instructions about good moral principles of our culture. Young people are expected to learn all about what society expects of them in order to lead good and decent lives. Some of the things they are taught about are marriage, traditional medicine, customs, spirituality, and philosophy of the tribe. This is the most important schooling in our African culture.

After a period of time, especially in villages, when the elders see that the young person is ready and mature, he or she is given permission to get married. The young person is also entitled to have his or her own home, land, house, and cattle. He or she is able to participate actively in matters affecting the family, clan, or tribe. Once married, a couple is expected to have as many children as they can. Culturally, children are the wealth and blessing from Mlungu (God). The more children you have, the richer you are in our African culture. There are certain other expectations a married person is supposed to meet. For example, if a person’s way of life is good, then he or she will be considered by the community to be an elder. Once that good person dies, he or she will later be considered to be an ancestor of that family or community.

## MEANING OF RELIGIOUS VOWS

**Vow of Poverty.** In our African culture, the vow of poverty has no meaning at all. We believe that a poor person is cursed by God and our ancestors. Nobody in our culture would love to live the vow of poverty according to the way it has been understood in our religious life.

When one joins religious life, the standard of living is uplifted, depending on where one comes from. One has plenty of food, clothes, access to education, and many other privileges, compared with the common people who live around us. When we were growing up our parents taught us that living in poverty is evil. One has to work extra hard in order to overcome it. Some of the members of my family still do not understand this vow I have embraced as a religious. They often wonder why I have chosen to live in poverty while I am already rich in another way. I am, therefore, a contradiction to them, especially in the manner I dress, the friaries and houses in which I live, the cars I drive, and other things.

The real meaning of this vow in my culture would be not having my own house, wife, children, and property. Having these things is a sign of richness in our African tradition. Since I do not possess any of these things, I am regarded as a poor person by my

culture. The word *poverty* in my culture is deceiving and meaningless. One possible explanation I can give them for my vow is that it means “being available always to the community”—that is, sharing what I have and what I am with the community. Poor people in our society are those who do not share: childless people, witches, sorcerers, and adulterers. These people are usually considered outcasts and are not allowed to be part of the richness of the community. They are usually lonely people living by themselves.

Cursed poverty for us is not to share in the life of the community—not to be hospitable and generous to others. A person is poor and cursed because he or she is not a community-minded person. Self-centered people live and die poor in our society. Our Franciscan documents say that personal and communal poverty is accepted as an indispensable form of life that helps us to detach ourselves from earthly goods, but at the same time calls us to responsibility for all material goods that are God’s gifts.

**Vow of Obedience.** Obedience in our African culture is a value. The Bemba people of Zambia have proverbs that say things like “A disobedient child grew his beard behind his neck” and “A disobedient child ate his or her father’s food.” The concept of obedience, for us Africans, involves a positive relationship with all people. Young people, beginning in early life, are taught to be submissive to elders. We believe that elders or people in authority are symbols of wisdom. According to our tradition, an elder can miss something with a stone but cannot miss with a word.

Religious obedience, in an African context, should be a greater willingness to submit ourselves to the will of God and to what the superiors ask us to do. We learn to become generous listeners to God and to others, with proper humility. One of the important elements of African culture is the view of the hierarchy of being. For example, one moves up the ladder of life through growth by natural means. This is an African social status: the person deserves to listen to others and also to be listened to.

The one who has authority has more life than those under him or her. Authority is seen in terms of promotion and maintenance of the common life of the culture. The actions of the leader, even what may be regarded as private, are believed to affect the subjects, for better or for worse. A leader must be conscious of his or her grave responsibility to sustain and enhance life. The leader may be a father or mother of a family or an elder of a clan. In fulfillment of the task given, he or she should not work alone. He or she should rely on the experience and advice of others. Even our chiefs are surrounded by a limited council

that helps them in making decisions. Obedience is the natural response of the subjects. They should know that their leader has the difficult task of making sure that the common life of each of them is fostered. If they have this conviction, it will be easier for them to observe this vow.

**Vow of Chastity.** Chastity is something known to almost all cultures. In some tribes in Zambia, and in other tribes elsewhere in Africa, some couples abstain from sexual contact during hunting seasons to protect themselves from evil in the forests. Some people are chosen to guard certain shrines and have to remain unmarried and free from all sexual contact as long as they are performing that function. In my tribe, for example, when a chief dies, he is to be buried with young virgin girls as an honor for his title.

But perpetual celibacy is not an African cultural value. People who stay unmarried all their lives are usually considered outcasts by society. Celibacy for Africans is not a permanent way of life. This is because we believe that every person has an obligation here on earth to transmit life through procreation. Celibacy is a preparation for a dignified future marriage for young people. In our traditional cultures, for example, young people are to remain chaste before marriage in order for them to have that dignity and the respect of society when they get married. There is a proverb in my tribe that says, “Keep your neck; beads are not difficult to find.” This means that if one lives a chaste life, a bride or bridegroom will be easy to find when the time for getting married comes.

A perpetually celibate life is a big contradiction for our African culture, because sexuality is a sacred and life-giving process. There is an obligation on the part of all human beings to procreate. As a young man, my parents taught me that sex was part of my life and was not to be discussed openly because it was sacred. I was also taught that if I did not produce children, I would be an outcast of my family and clan. I would no longer be a member of the community because I would not be contributing my life to the community. Once I died, nobody would remember me or name a child after me, for I would be a cursed person. The failure to bring life into the world means not being a partaker of the Life-Giver who is God the Creator. Having no children would be the worst disgrace, not only to my family but also to the whole society. Barrenness is the worst condition a person can experience in our culture. However, I—through my religious vow of celibacy—am considered to be a member of the community in another context.

It is certain that the practice of celibacy in our



African culture does not naturally lead to the type of celibacy proposed by the gospel or religious life today. Surprisingly enough, this religious celibacy, which is not valued in our culture, is attracting many of us who are Africans to live it. But our African cultural way of life has an influence on it. Our cultural teachings about celibacy have helped us to understand its importance.

Since celibacy as a lifestyle does not exist in our African traditional context, we have to express it in our consecrated way of life in order for the people to understand that it is possible to live it. African religious have to be taught that, as celibates, they are fathers or mothers of all the people. They have to learn how to share their intimate relationships maturely and openly in their communities and with other people: "Friends we need, love we must." As I pointed out earlier on, chastity is not something new to Africans. For example, during the pregnancy period, the husband is not supposed to have sex with his wife or with any other woman, in order to avoid a "bad birth." After the birth of the child, and until it is weaned, all sexual contact between the couple or with other people is prohibited. This is to avoid harm being done to the child's life. When disasters such as droughts, war, bereavement in the family, or competition strike them, couples must avoid sex at all costs in order not to offend our ancestors.

The above instances of chastity within marriage emphasize the point that an African can sacrifice sexual pleasure for the sake of life. Being able to relate to this can help our local people to understand the concept of consecrated chastity in religious life. Some foreign missionaries think that we Africans have more difficulties with the vow of chastity than they do. This opinion is based on ignorance, and it is incorrect. I strongly believe that God did not create a chaste race or a group of chaste people. To live a chaste or celibate life is a gift from God, and God gives it to any person, regardless of race or culture. Problems with celibacy can also be found in all human beings and cultures.

Celibacy, for me, is rooted in faith and in living the life of Christ. There are many African religious who live this vow, and their silent example is enough to

prove that celibate life is possible for Africans. The vow of celibacy in this context is viewed as something sacred and very important. According to our tradition, once a boy or girl violates his or her manhood or womanhood before marriage, then his or her social status in the community is low. Nobody will respect that individual; he or she will be considered a person without dignity and may have difficulties in finding a marriage partner.

## CALL TO AFRICAN RELIGIOUS

The primary objective of this article is to lead the young African religious of today to discover, assimilate, and deepen their religious identity according to their culture, in vows, community life, and the charism of their institute. This has to be done by Africans who have a wider vision for the future and an awareness of the proper needs of the church in Africa today. The bishops in the African synod stressed that the formation given to the candidates in our seminaries and religious formation houses often fails to root them well enough in their cultural heritage. This can lead to their living in a very insecure state, perpetually wearing a mask.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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*Ministry and Community: Recognizing and Preventing Ministry Impairment* by Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000. 124 pages. \$11.95.

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**E**ver since I started providing psychological assessments of clerical aspirants and impaired clergy for church organizations, I have been looking for a certain book. It would describe “red flags” that psychologists and church officials see when they psychologically test and interview ministerial candidates. The book would provide detailed information about types of psychopathology that impair clergy. It would remark on organizational dynamics that enable impaired ministers to persist in ministry. The book would suggest remedial strategies to psychologists and church officials. And its intellectual base would rest on sound social scientific and theological principles.

Len Sperry has finally written this book. *Ministry and Community: Recognizing and Preventing Ministry Impairment* is well researched, well written, and well worth the wait. Anyone concerned with preventing clerical dysfunction or treating impaired ministers should read this excellent volume.

In the opening chapter, Sperry notes that ministers’ personality dynamics can fixate in dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that damage ministry, harm parishioners, and defame church organizations. Psychotherapy and medications offer genuine help, but the best solutions also address “dysfunctional ministry settings that foster and reinforce this impairment.” Sperry recommends that interventions dually focus on the personality dynamics of the impaired minister and the organizational dynamics that compound them. The next eight chapters explore personality disorders commonly seen in ministerial settings.

Because several church scandals of the past decade have borne the mark of narcissism, I found Sperry’s chapter on that disorder especially relevant. Narcissists have grandiose self-images, fantasies of unlimited success, and a voracious appetite for admiration. Sperry subclassifies narcissistic clergy into reactive, self-deceptive, and constructive categories.

Reactive narcissists suffer from grandiosity and require sycophants. They are paranoid and cruel. Their fantastic ministry plans inevitably fail. Such ministers psychologically reiterate the malignant psychodynamics of Hitler and Khomeini.

Self-deceptive narcissistic ministers lack the reactivities’ malignancy but suffer from pronounced grandiosity and “specialness.” Some hide in celibate vocations, in which they avoid mature sexual intimacy and engage in ego-inflating fantasies of perfect sexual partners and experiences. Ministerially, they insinuate themselves into their congregations as objects of worship.

Constructive narcissists have narcissistic personality features but lack a disordered character. Although sometimes aloof, such ministers inspire parishes and set realistic goals. Constructively narcissistic ministers lack the ruthless grandiosity of reactive narcissists and the hunger for adoration that characterizes self-deceptive narcissists. Once church organizations see the destructive pattern of empire building and exclusivity set in motion by ministers who are reactive and self-deceptive narcissists, dismissal by a strong board may be required. Remedial efforts other than termination often fail because narcissistic ministers disregard externally set boundaries. Psychological testing of aspirants should be taken seriously, because ministerial candidates with pronounced narcissistic pathology should be weeded out as early as possible. Prevention is key.

In additional chapters, Sperry sets forth descriptions and preventive measures regarding a range of psychopathologies that characterize impaired ministers. He notes that most sexually abusive ministers have character pathology comorbid with sexual



misconduct. Ministers with psychopathic personalities become recognizable when immoral behavior demonstrates an underdeveloped sense of conscience. Ministers with borderline personality disorder cannot tolerate perceived rejection and ruin churches with rage and revenge. Ministers with hypomanic personalities display narcissistic traits and tend to be high-energy achievers who put themselves above God and their superiors. Ministers with obsessive-compulsive traits elevate impersonal, work-related perfectionism over relationships and grace. Ministers with depressive personalities exhibit gloominess and low self-esteem and feel beyond the reach of God's love; dejected, they perform poorly. Ministers with passive-aggressive traits vacillate between compliance with and defiance of work demands and allow their unresolved hostility to infuriate others by underperforming.

Sperry emphasizes that each type of characterologically flawed minister requires specific interventions. These can be as drastic as removal from ministerial duties or range from spiritual direction to combinations of medication and psychotherapy. The best cure, however, is prevention.

To conclude *Ministry and Community*, Sperry provides DSM-IV-style criteria for the unfit ministerial candidate. The unfit candidate demonstrates severe character pathology, along with one of the following: resistance to mentoring; refusal of treatment; criminality; addiction; or traitlike dysfunction in work history.

This slender volume is well-written and practical. The author weaves together good psychology, psychiatry, theology, and organizational dynamics. Brilliantly thought out and humbly written, this necessary book will help us weed out potentially impaired ministerial candidates and minister to impaired clergy under our charge. For anyone searching for a comprehensive understanding of impaired ministers, as well as practical solutions, Sperry's book is required reading.

—Charles Zeiders, Psy.D.

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*Sharing Wisdom: The Practical Art of Giving and Receiving Mentoring* by Robert J. Wicks. New York, New York: Crossroads, 2000. 141 pages. \$14.95.

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**T**he Hebrew Scriptures describe the nature and dignity of wisdom:

For she is an instructress in the understanding of God, the selector of his works. And if riches be a desirable possession in life, what is more rich than Wisdom, who produces all things? And if prudence renders service, who in the world is a better craftsman than she? Or if one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues, for she teaches moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men [and women] than these. (Wisdom 8:4-7)

Like Solomon, we are called not only to seek wisdom, to be truly wise in our decision making, but also to share the depths of our learning and discretion with those we counsel.

Robert J. Wicks has created a detailed handbook for growth in mentorship, *Sharing Wisdom: The Art of Giving and Receiving Mentoring*. This work is the gleaned result of his many years of directing the pastoral counseling doctoral program at Loyola College in Baltimore, as well as his experience as a professional mentor. In many ways, *Sharing Wisdom* is the sequel to Wicks's previous book, *Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*, which explores the dynamics of embracing a balanced, compassionate lifestyle in a world overloaded with stress, obligations, and expectations.

*Sharing Wisdom* contains forty brief chapters, an epilogue, and three appendixes. Each chapter contains three sections: 1) a description of a specific mentoring topic familiar to anyone in a helping, supervisory, teaching, counseling, or management position; 2) a development of the topic from the perspectives of theory and personal experience; and 3) a mentoring lesson to apply to one's daily regimen. Topics include respect, questioning, listening, modeling, nonjudgmentalism, feelings, detachment, boundaries, staying unhooked, withdrawing projections, and summarizing.

Wicks's writing style is insightful, transparent, and accessible. In the chapter "Freedom," he writes that

one of the greatest awakenings that mentoring provides is an awareness that we have hidden rules in life. We follow them without knowing we are doing it. We let them guide us even when they no longer make sense.

Our rules may have started as good ideas. They could be the stated or assumed values of our parents, church, business, or society. More often than not, however, there are at least four problems with them: 1) they are distorted versions of what we believe we have been taught or have learned. 2) They have been assimilated without critiques or reflection—possibly because we embraced them when we very young or impressionable. 3) They have taken on the gravity of the Ten Commandments—even though we were the ones who incorporated them into our belief system. 4) They may be unconsciously guiding us in the very direction we do not want to go and consciously say we are against.



As a mentor whose roles extend from teacher, confessor, pastoral counselor, and spiritual director to professional facilitator, I found *Sharing Wisdom* to be a useful and compact resource. The work, which could be used in pastoral, educational, or supervisory

group forums, refreshingly provides important guideposts and sage reminders for anyone giving or receiving mentoring.

—John P. Mossi, S.J., D.Min.

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(signed) James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Editor-in-Chief



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